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POLITICS AND RELIGION

For much of the 20th century religion was banished from politics. For most elites, God had been undone by Darwin, dismissed by Marx, deconstructed by Fraud. Stalin forcibly ejected Him, but in much of Western Europe there was no need for force: religion had been on the slide for centuries.

In America the number of churchgoers stayed high, but evangelical Christians retreated from politics, embarrassed by the failure of prohibition and the Scopes of Monkey trial (in which creationists were mocked.) In 1960 Jack Kennedy assured the country that his Catholicism would not pollute politics.

For modernizing post-colonial leaders in the developing world, secularism and progress were indivisible. The fez', said Kamal Ataturk, sat upon our heads as a sign of ignorance and fanaticism. In India Jawaharlal Nehru wished to make a clean sweep of organized religion: almost always it seems to stand for blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation and the preservation of vested interests. In Egypt Gamal Abdel Nasser, the champion of Arab Nationalism, clamped down on the Muslim Brotherhood. Africa's new rulers nationalized the Christian mission schools that had taught them. Even the Jewish state deemed religion a distraction.

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God In The Brain

- David Biello

The spiritual quest may be as old as humankind itself, but now there is a new place to look: inside our heads. Using fMRI and other tools of modern neuroscience, researchers are attempting to pin down what happens in the brain when people experience mystical awakenings during prayer and meditation or during spontaneous utterances inspired by religious fervor.

Such efforts to reveal the neural correlates of the divine—a new discipline with the warring titles "neurotheology" and "spiritual neuroscience"—not only might reconcile religion and science but also might help point to ways of eliciting pleasurable otherworldly feelings in people who do not have them or who cannot summon them at will. Because of the positive effect of such experiences on those who have them, some researchers speculate that the ability to induce them artificially could transform people's lives by making them happier, healthier and better able to concentrate. Ultimately, however, neuroscientists study this question because they want to better understand the neural basis of a phenomenon that plays a central role in the lives of so many.

Mystical Misfiring

Exploring this hypothesis, neuroscientist Vilayanur S. Ramachandran of the University of California, San Diego, asked several of his patients who have temporal lobe epilepsy to listen to a mixture of religious, sexual and neutral words while he tested the intensity of their emotional reactions using a measure of arousal called the galvanic skin response, a fluctuation in the electrical resistance of the skin. The key, Ramachandran speculates, may be the limbic system, which comprises interior regions of the brain that govern emotion and emotional memory, such as the amygdala and hypothalamus. By strengthening the connection between the temporal lobe and these emotional centers, epileptic electrical activity may spark religious feeling.

To seal the case for the temporal lobe's involvement, Michael Persinger of Laurentian University in Ontario sought to artificially re-create religious feelings by electrically stimulating that large subdivision of the brain. So Persinger created the "God helmet," which generates weak electromagnetic fields and focuses them on particular regions of the brain's surface. In a series of studies conducted over the past several decades, Persinger and his team have trained their device on the temporal lobes of hundreds of people. In doing so,

the researchers induced in most of them the experience of a sensed presence—a feeling that someone (or a spirit) is in the room when no one, in fact, is—or of a profound state of cosmic bliss that reveals a universal truth. During the three-minute bursts of stimulation, the affected subjects translated this perception of the divine into their own cultural and religious language—terming it God, Buddha, a benevolent presence or the wonder of the universe.

Brain scans alone cannot fully describe a mystical state, however. Because fMRI depends on blood flow, which takes place on the order of seconds, fMRI images do not capture real-time changes in the firing of neurons, which occur within milliseconds. That is why Beauregard turned to a faster technique called quantitative electro-ence-phalography (EEG), which measures the voltage from the summed responses of millions of neurons and can track its fluctuation in real time. His team outfitted the nuns with red bathing caps studded with electrodes that pick up electric currents from neurons. These currents merge and appear as brain waves of various frequencies that change as the nuns again recall an intense experience with another person and a deep connection with God.

Fool's Errand?

The brain mediates every human experience from breathing to contemplating the existence of God. And whereas activity in neural networks is what gives rise to these experiences, neuroimaging cannot yet pinpoint such activity at the level of individual neurons. Instead it provides far cruder anatomical information, highlighting the broad swaths of brain tissue that appear to be unusually dynamic or dormant. But using such vague structural clues to explain human feelings and behaviors may be a fool's errand. "You list a bunch of places in the brain as if naming something lets you understand it," opines neuropsychologist Seth Horowitz of Brown University. Vincent Paquette, who collaborated with Beauregard on his experiments, goes further, likening neuro-imaging to phrenology, the practice in which Victorian-era scientists tried—and ultimately failed—to intuit clues about brain function and character traits from irregularities in the shape of the skull.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but so is everything else. Nothing we experience falls outside the mind, and the wonderful wetware behind it we call the brain. So looking into it to find out what's going on when we experience some of the most profound--and ancient--of human experiences is a no brainier.

But researchers must tread with caution. Science understands little of the mind, let alone the brain that generates it (and even that would be debated by some). So it is nearly impossible then to probe a mindful experience like being touched by the divine, especially with the crude tools of fMRI, EEG and other neuro-scans. If we cannot know the mind of man, how then can we know the mind of a presumed god?

Still, it's interesting to take a peek, no matter whether you are Richard Dawkins (who, interestingly, failed to experience anything in the putative "God helmet," a finding its progenitor Persinger put down to a brain abnormality), the Dalai Lama, or even Pope Benedict. What do you think we might find?

Spiritual neuroscience studies also face the profound challenge of language. No two mystics describe their experiences in the same way, and it is difficult to distinguish among the various types of mystical experiences, be they spiritual or traditionally religious. To add to the ambiguity, such feelings could also encompass awe of the universe or of nature. Rather than attempting to define religious experience to understand it, some say we should be boiling it down to its essential components. Other research problems abound. None of the techniques,

for example, can precisely delineate specific brain regions. After all, what human experience is just one detail different from the awe and love felt in the presence of God?

To be sure, people may differ in their proclivity to spiritual awakening. After all, not everyone finds God with the God helmet. Thus, scientists may need to retrofit the technique to the patient. And it is possible that some people's brains will simply resist succumbing to the divine. Moreover, no matter what neural correlates scientists may find, the results cannot prove or disprove the existence of God.

(*Abridged version of the article appeared in Scientific American Mind, October 2007*)

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Urgent Need to Enact Bill on Eradication of Black Magic, Evil Practices and Customs

-Prabhakar Nananwaty

In a recent issue of Andha-shraddha Nirmoolan Vartapatra, a Marathi monthly published by ANS, there are four articles describing the incidents of increased spread of superstitions occurred in various parts of Maharashtra. Let us look at them one by one.

Teacher's Story

Raybhan Tembhurne is a school teacher in a small village of Bhandara district. He had three daughters; eldest Ratna, age 20, studying in college; Amita, age 16, studying in 12th standard; and the youngest Seema, age 13, studying in high-school. His was apparently a happy family. He had very good rapport with the villagers. He had some psychological problems for which he was under treatment in Nagpur. One of his friends suggested that he should meet Nandini, a lady *Mantrik*, famous in that area to cure any chronic disease, to treat jaundice patients, and to de-possess the witches. The public believed that she has supernatural power for handling such patients. Raybhan was very much impressed by her 'treatment'. He was a firm believer of *Satyug*, a cult to bring goodness on this earth. He proposed Nandini to be with him to bring *Satyug*. She deserted her husband and started living with him as a 'second wife'. She terrorized his family as well as villagers with her 'spell of Goddess'. Every one started addressing her Mataji. Raybhan's family was mesmerized by her speech and action. The young daughters stopped going to school. Mataji would never allow anyone in the family to take any outside medicine if they are ill. Mataji would insist that it is a spell of spirit and she has power to heal.

However one day the eldest daughter, Ratna, fell ill. But Mataji did not allow her any medical treatment. Nandini tried her power of healing. But Ratna succumbed to death that night. Raybhan buried the body in a nearby plot in spite of the plot-owners protest. The news of

Ratna's death reached the villagers and rumours started spreading. Agitated villagers believed that Raybhan had killed his daughter, instigated by Nandini who promised him a son if he sacrificed the daughter. The angry crowd wanted to kill all the members of the family for such a heinous act. However police interfered in time and pacified the crowd. The crowd insisted for a full inquiry of the incident by conducting the post mortem of the body. The body was excavated and sent to hospital. Villagers found flowers, coconut and other things of worship near the burial place. The timely action by the police prevented the massacre of the family and aftermath effects as it happened in Khairalanji incident. A Dalit family would have been victim of wrath of the society. The family was arrested and sent to jail.

These types of incidents are happening very frequently. It may happen that all the culprits will be released without any punishment due to some loopholes in the law under which they have been arrested.

Sufi Sikandar Shah

Jalana district in Marathawada area of Maharashtra is comparatively a backward area san education, san infrastructure facilities. That may be one reason for having a big harvest of *Babas, Maharajas,* and *Devis* operating in that district either openly or secretly. Suphiji Sikandar Shah is one of them who used to advertise in local newspaper. The gist of his advertisement used to be that he will change the destiny of the visitors; he has 22 years of experience; within 76 hours one will find the effect of his blessings for cases like loss in business, marriage stuck ups, family problems, not having any issues, possessed by ghost and spirit, cure for chronic diseases, de-addiction, vitality etc; tie the amulet blessed by him and problems will vanish. He camped in a hotel along with 4-5 accomplices and had a roaring business. No one raised an iota of doubt that a young person of age 25 – 26 can have experience of 22 years! He decorated his room with pictures of Hindu and Muslim gods and goddesses including Saibaba of Shirdi.

ANS activists decided to expose this Suphi 'saint'. A sting operation was planned. Activists posing as a couple visited his place and narrated that they do not have any issues. Shah suggested that he has to examine the lady alone. While examining he was trying to remove her Sari. However, keeping presence of mind, she came out on some pretext. She narrated whole story to the activists and gathering. When they met Shah once again, he told that they have to perform certain rituals so that they may have issues. He started telling some cock and bull stories to impress the gathering. All the while he was insisting that she should come alone for the rituals. The team of activists, local police authority and TV crew entered his room and encountered him. He was shivering in his pants and on enquiry he confessed that he did all these things to amass the wealth. Because of preparedness of ANS activists, cooperation of the authorities and conscious public the gang is now in the jail awaiting the judgment.

Kundalini Baba

A local Spiritualism Centre in Madgao, Goa arranged a workshop of four days of Siddha Rameshaji Chouhan recently. Centre was very proud of such a distinguished guest who is an expert in awakening Kundalini through which good health, immense peace of mind and spiritual knowledge can be gained. The handbill circulated in the town promised many things about the Kundalini. "This Kundalini awakening process will result in removing all wicked thoughts, avarice, and bad habits from one's life. The process of Shambhavi will bring the healing and supernatural powers. The Ganesh process will promise freedom from all spells; there will not be any worries hence forth. The patients suffering from kidney, heart, cancer, blood-

pressure, AIDS, tumor, will have soothing experiences." The handbill also mentioned the contact number for further information. On enquiry it was revealed that though the public lecture in the town hall is free of charge but subsequent consultation will cost 3000 Rs per day.

Local ANS activists attended the first day lecture. The host from the Centre introduced the guest, mentioning that Chouhan is a mechanical engineer and has six manufacturing units. In spite of being a millionaire, he has come all the way to fulfill the social commitment and bring happiness to all the listeners. At the end of the demonstration of Kundalini and the lecture, ANS activists started asking pertinent questions about Kundalini.

"It is observed that generally a spiritual person never indulge into self praise. How you are allowing such things?" To answer this, Kundalini Baba murmured something which was not audible at all. One activist suggested that Chouhan Guruji should visit Deaf and Dumb School and cure a few of the patients by Kundalini awakening.

"Guruji, our people are ardent devotees of God Vitthal, Pandurang, Ganesh, Mangesh, etc. and we are leading a very satisfied and contented life by God's blessings. Why do we need this Kundalini as though God's blessings are not adequate?" Chouhan kept mum.

'Guruji, there is a reference in Dnyaneshwari, that the persons with Kundalini power will be able to see the incidents happening beyond seven seas through telepathy, will you be able to tell us what is there behind the screen at your backside?" This question irritated him. "Do you mean to say that I don't possess spiritual power?" he said angrily. At that juncture, the devotees of Guruji started shouting and disturbing the session. "We are interested in Guruji's speech; not your questions and answers". The devotees started attacking the TV crew and other journalists who were recording the events. Someone snatched the camera of a local journalist. Meanwhile police interfered and pacified both the parties. Thus the session ended with utter confusion.

It has become craze to arrange such bizarre workshops, lectures etc. to confuse the minds of the public by tall claims and concoct weird methods to achieve the everlasting peace of mind and happiness. These so called counseling centers are in money spinning business by fooling the people, including educated ones. There is no positive preventive method to curb such practices.

Nivruttibua from Kolhapur

Nivrutti Ramachandra Chougule, a middle aged person, who took voluntary retirement, started the business of family counseling in and around his village in Kolhapur district posing as Godman. It was rumoured that he practices black magic to cure the patients of chronic diseases; he has supernatural powers to solve any issues of the family. People used to rush to him for his advice, and sometimes called him to visit their places and bless them with his power.

A married woman from Tamagao, a village near Kolhapur invited him for 'Vaastushanti'. During the ceremony Nivruttibua suggested her to have sexual relations to achieve the happiness of the new house. The lady was utterly confused and narrated the story to her family members. The members were very angry and the word spread around the village. The villagers gathered and started beating Nivruttibua with whatever in their hands. They tore his clothing and put a garland of shoes and chappals around his neck and took a procession to nearby police station. Though police tried to safeguard Nivruttibua's life from the crowd, the crowd wanted to beat him to death so as to punish him for his sexual desires.

These incidents are not rare. They occur regularly in villages. Since there is not much of news value, the news stories do not appear in the press or in media unless there are some extreme consequences. Police are not in a position to prevent such incidents due to lack of adequate laws.

All the above four incidents are self explanatory about the failure of existing laws to curb them. The time has come to stop all this nonsense, happening under the name of God and religion. The devoted people who have faith in the God also should come up and support the rationalists to prevent such episodes in future and insist to enact the law to prevent black magic, evil practices and gory customs which are still prevailing in the society.

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From Mark Twain's Notebook

If I were to construct a God I would furnish Him with some way and qualities and characteristics which the Present lacks. He would not stoop to ask for any man's compliments, praises, flatteries; and He would be far above exacting them. I would have Him as self-respecting as the better sort of man in these regards. He would not be a merchant, a trader. He would not buy these things. He would not sell, or offer to sell, temporary benefits of the joys of eternity for the product called worship. I would have Him as dignified as the better sort of man in this regard.

He would value no love but the love born of kindnesses conferred; not that born of benevolences contracted for. Repentance in a man's heart for a wrong done would cancel and annul that sin; and no verbal prayers for forgiveness be required or desired or expected of that man. He would not be a jealous God--a trait so small that even men despise it in each other. He would not boast.

He would keep private His admirations of Himself; He would regard self-praise as unbecoming the dignity of his position. He would not have the spirit of vengeance in His heart. Then it would not issue from His lips. There would not be any hell--except the one we live in from the cradle to the grave. There would not be any heaven--the kind described in the world's Bibles.

He would spend some of His eternities in trying to forgive Himself for making man unhappy when he could have made him happy with the same effort and he would spend the rest of them in studying astronomy.

Nailers of Beed

Gitesh Shelke

Blood gushed out in rapid spurts from the woman's head; thick red, dark. Her lifeless body, still warm, had already been bludgeoned by others. Prakash Jamdade was waiting for his turn to drive nails into her forehead. That is when crematorium workers caught him.

At the time of arrest, Jamdade looked confused, even disgusted with the police. He felt he had done no crime. He felt this is what should be done with young woman who die, especially if the death comes close after childbirth. For Jamadade and his neo-Buddhist community members, it is only logical to drive nails deep into the foreheads of dead women. This, they feel, stops the spirit from turning evil.

The nails, they believe, also become barrier when the women want to return as ghosts and haunt those they disliked during their earthly days.

The police were recently rattled; some were plain terrified, when they came to know that such a practice was being followed by a Buddhist community in Beed district of Maharashtra. It was in May this year, in Pune, at the Bopodi crematorium that the horrifying ritual came exposed.

Workers at the crematorium were stunned to see a man pull out a half-inch nail from his pocket, ready to hammer it into the head of 29 – year old Leela Prakash Sasane. There were already a dozen nails driven across her blood soaked temple, turning her body into a canvas of malevolent art.

A sculpture that was as hideous as it was bloody. Jamadade, of Bopkel, was aiming the nail at the woman's forehead when horrified crematorium workers stopped him.

When the police arrested the elderly Jamadade, who turned out to be some sort of priest in the community, under IPC section 297 (trespassing of burial places; committing indignity to human corpse), he was both puzzled and offended.

He even told the court that he had performed three such ceremonies back in his hometown, Beed, and he did not understand why he was being arrested. According to the Pune police, Jamadade during his interrogation told them that the ritual is commonly practiced in Beed district.

In fact the weird custom also dictates that nails be hammered into the palms of dead women. Then in a chilling routine the palms, nailed and bleeding, are placed across the chest, the feet are brought together.

Antisuperstition activist Dr Narendra Dabholkar, president of the Andhashradha Nirmoolan Samiti, said it was because of the wide spread fear of ghosts among the poor in this region that such a bizarre practice was being followed.

Those who know about the community whisper that there is little anyone can do about. The nailers of Beed will, at least for now, continue to draw blood from their dead with a hammer and cold half – inch nails.

Courtesy: *Times News Network*

Rationalism

and

Scientific Temper

-M. Subbarao

As for as I understand, there is a popular misconception that rationalism is just a denial of the existence of god and religion in any form. Rationalists are not just propagandists of atheism or crusaders against god. That is a negative view of rationalism. But rationalism is a positive attitude to do good to human beings by promoting ethics, self-knowledge, self-discipline and self-development. Rationalism is a battle to liberate humanity from ignorance, religious prejudice and superstition. Its main business is to make the discovered truths available to all and induce everybody to draw his own rational conclusions about the meaning, purpose and conduct of life.

The accepted definition of rationalism evolved as early as 1899 is: - It is the mental attitude that unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason, and aims at establishing a system of Philosophy and ethics verifiable by experience and independent of all arbitrary assumptions of authority.

Speaking of "Rationalism" Gowans Whyte states "Rationalism", is an intellectual, movement, does not offer a ready-made creed to replace the religious creeds in which most people have been brought up. Were it to do so, it would be attempting to impose the same sort of official authority as the churches and to discharge the free exercise of individual reason. Its proper business is to make the discovered truth available to all and to induce everybody to draw his own rational conclusions about the meaning, the purpose and conduct of life. Late D.M.K. Chief Annadorai says: "Rationalism does not mean repudiation of basic or fundamental truths and maxims, but the annihilation of dubious modes of thought and action".

Rationalism is not a system or a faith or a creed ready to be handled like a measuring rod. It is an attitude of mind. It is a movement of ideas. It is not an academic exercise indulged by the learned few. It is concerned with the people and

community in all its aspects. Its task is to show the approach of reason to all problems of individual and his social life. It lays down the foundation of a new philosophy of life. It provides an alternative way of life and/ or philosophy for those who desire to throwaway orthodox religion and morals based on fear of god. It is not a creed or set of dogmas, religious or philosophical. Its main task is the diffusion of sound knowledge. Since rationalism is mainly an attitude of mind, continuance of that attitude is essential to sustain efforts required for rationalists to keep abreast of the growth of knowledge, for that alone will prevent rationalism from getting rusty and unserviceable. The values that rationalism gathers are not permanent for all time to come. It calls for a constant and vigilant recasting of morals and other values to suit the changing pattern of society.

Positive Approach

It is not mere denial of the existence of god; it is a philosophy by itself as Buddhism, Jainism, and Confucianism as propounded by their founders. It is a struggle against injustice, inequality, and slavery. It is a quest for truth and social reform. Rationalism and humanism are realistic alternatives to theology. Rationalism attempts to transcend divisive, parochial loyalties based on caste, race, religion, nationality, creed, class, or ethnicity. It strives hard to work together for the common good of humanity. It nourishes common moral excellence like altruism, integrity, honesty, truthfulness, reason, compassion etc. It stands for belief in optimism rather than pessimism, hope rather than despair, learning in place of dogma, truth instead of ignorance, tolerance in place of fear, love instead of hatred, compassion over selfishness, and reason over blind faith. Rationalist propaganda is the only solution to liquidate blind faith.

Aims and Objectives

Rationalism aims at the development of potentialities of the individual with freedom or and independence. Its endeavor is to achieve the ideal of social freedom and to create a new renaissance. Its main objective is to liberate human thought from the limitations of caste, creed, religion, and nationality. Rationalism promotes an attitude optimism, which helps to develop healthy and dynamic minds to overcome any crisis. It emphasizes the dignity and work of man as man and his potential capacity to build a peaceful, decent world where there is no exploitation of man and where hunger poverty and racial prejudices do not exist. Aristotle was the first philosopher who defined man as a rational being. He taught that rationality differentiates man from animal Animals act from instinct while human beings are endowed with the faculty of reasoning, which governs their conduct and action. Rationalism regards reason as the chief source and test of knowledge. Rationalism holds reason to be a faculty that can lay hold of truth, beyond the reach of sense perception. For example, if democracy is considered to be the best form of government, rationalism demands that it must be shown to the people how this belief stands to reason. Rationalism wants people to learn to govern themselves by reason, as it is a supreme and innate human quality, which can be applied to the shaping of our future.

Scientific Temper

It is supplementary to Rationalism. Then what is Science? Science is the systematic observation and classification of natural phenomena in order to learn about them and bring them under general principles and laws as per the 20th centaury dictionary. Scientific temperament, scientific thinking, scientific outlook are derived from science.

Science

Man's knowledge which expanded as a result of observation and experience slowly became organized as Science, which in time began to claim the whole of man's

experience as its field of study. Science is organized knowledge. It relies on reason in its search for facts. All theories of science must satisfy man's reason. The methods of science are experiment and observation and an acceptance of the validity of sense experience. The function of science is to accumulate factual knowledge of the universe including man. The discoveries of science came into conflict with the beliefs sanctified by religion, thus giving rise to a conflict between science and religion.

It needs to be pointed out, however, that the conflict between science and religion is not merely a conflict between discovered fact and revealed wisdom, but between two fundamentally different attitudes to life: the rational and the religious. The rationalist mental attitude is the basis of science and the scientific method.

Science is not a mere collection of facts. Science is knowledge, organized and presented in a systematic manner, to understand the nature of and the underlying principles behind the facts that we study. Every law of science must, without a single exception, be valid universally, at all times and all places. These laws are not valid merely notionally or approximately but exactly. Scientific phenomena should be repeatable and demonstrable. If I observe phenomena, it is not enough that I observed it. It should be possible for me to demonstrate it before you, you and you. Each one of the laws of science can be, have been and will be tested by anybody starting from a high school student to a Nobel Laureate. Science gives us a way to understand the physical world around us. In fact, it is the only way of understanding the physical world around us. A scientist who sees the beauty and elegance of science may say science is so perfect and is so complete that he does not need to believe in the Supreme Being. Science explains everything.

Science denies the existence of the supernatural and magic, which is the very essence of religion. Another important attribute of science is that it allows one to make testable predictions. All truths at any given time in science are truths by consensus. Science is, evolutionary, while religion is not. All new knowledge in science must be consistent with known and established observations. The growth of scientific knowledge is a continuous process. Science is, therefore, evolutionary. A religion once founded continues substantially unchanged. An important attribute of science is the right to question. Knowledge advances and science progresses because people exercise their right to question. If you question, it must be only to seek clarification and not to doubt.

Science is truly international, religion is not. Scientists all over the world use the same method, that is, the method of science. They employ the same techniques, use the same materials, and publish frequently in the same journals. They are increasingly beginning to use the same language – that is, English – and they form a truly international community in which the professional links are at least as strong as any other link. There is little communication between various religions and, therefore, no common language. Religious customs and practices differ enormously, often fundamentally, from religion to religion. Religion, in fact, divides people while science unites them. Today, we understand, reasonably well, what might have been the likely origin of the universe? It is generally accepted by scientists that the universe came into existence about 18 billion years ago, and they can trace the history of the universe backwards to nearly 10^{47} (power) of a second just after the event of its formation – called the 'big bang' by the astronomers. Today, scientists can say with considerable certainty that life on our planet evolved from non-living materials. After the formation of the earth,

complex chemical substances were slowly formed from the simple chemical substances that were contained in the primordial atmosphere; such a 'chemical' evolution eventually dovetailed into the biological evolution.

Knowledge of the universe, Darwin's theory of evolution of life on this earth, systematization of knowledge, rational thinking of facts, theories and further scientific analysis should reach the common man and make him think. There is every need to develop scientific thinking and outlook among all sections of people.

Work hard to cultivate a scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry. Educate others around you by installing in them a scientific temper and the spirit of inquiry. This will help every country to progress.

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Rationalism and Atheism

Rationalist is the one whose actions and decisions are based on reason rather than emotions or beliefs. Rationalists don't reject any ideology just because it's bizarre, thus rationalists try to find answers logically and critically - rather than dictation or following set rules.

Atheist is the one who completely denies the existence of the God, hence more as agnostic whereas rationalists need reasons in order to be convinced acceptable to the knowledge that can be found, where Atheist need to see the end product in order to believe it.

We can also argue Darwin's theory of evolution here. Others who believe in God argue that God created the world. So even though you give reasons to Atheists, you can't convince them because reasons which are based on logic aren't enough for them. They need to see the end result...in order to be convinced.

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Dalits, Humanism and Human Sacrifice

-Babu Gogineni

The Leadership Training Camp for Dalits being organised in Suryapet town (Andhra Pradesh, India) with IHEU's support was going at full speed. Mr. Veeraswami the leader of *Spoorthi*, the local implementing organisation, and Mr. V.B. Rawat, Director of the Social Development Foundation, the event's sponsor, were participating along with Sujatha, a sociologist and Dalit women's rights campaigner based in Hyderabad. There were a hundred Dalit youths, men and women, many of them eager to learn about modern science, about the situation of Dalits and of women in the country, about superstitions, and about the plight of untouchables worldwide.

New Resolve

By the end of a full day of discussions and lectures when Chandraiah, the miracle-exposure activist concluded his demonstration, many of the Dalit youth, several of them superstitious themselves, had undergone a change of outlook. Some of them declared that they were now inspired to work against superstition in their community, as they understood the tricks being played on them by charlatans, and as they now realised the harm it did to their fellow Dalits. We were told of plans in one village to kill a suspected sorcerer, and that following the day's discussions they were now determined to prevent it by educating the villagers and also informing the local authorities. Veeraswami then told us that the next day's miracle-exposure programme was to be held in Pasunur village in the Tungathurthi region because the Dalits there were traumatised and terrified. For some time there had been talk of human sacrifice. Killing of witches?

Human sacrifice? As what we heard sank in, I felt disgust and horror. We were just six hours away by car from Hyderabad – one of India's Hi-tech show-piece cities – but time rolls back a thousand years in this short distance.

Gods want it

We had to intervene urgently. The next morning we set out at early with Veeraswami and other Dalit leaders from the region, along with a reporter from ETV, one of most important TV channels in South India. Chandraiah told us about his experiences as a child who had grown up in the region: "In the 60s whenever a rice mill or a new industrial unit was to be inaugurated in the region, one of the workers or a villager would mysteriously die on the factory premises. Everyone remained silent, but all knew that the gods wanted a sacrifice and now that they were satisfied the victim's family would get ten thousand rupees and all was forgotten." On the way to the village the situation was explained to us: the Government had constructed an

impressive school at a cost of 3.5 million rupees. It was the pride of the region, but no classes were being conducted one month into the new school year because a man in touch with God had declared that the school building demanded *aarambhan* (human sacrifice) of six children before it could be safely inaugurated.

Pasunur Village Dalit Colony

At the Dalit colony, everyone was summoned for the morning meeting. I asked the village President about this matter of *aarambhan*. He denied it. The other villagers also denied any knowledge of the matter. V.B.Rawat suggested we ask the children why they were not going to school. When the children spoke, and this time to the TV cameras, the adults had no choice but to acknowledge that they were keeping their children at home because of the fear that they might be sacrificed. After all, who had ever heard of upper-caste children being sacrificed? If it were to happen, theirs would be the victims.

The crowd was sceptical. One woman loudly whispered, "Are you going to give us money for coming to this meeting? Because of you our men are not going out today to work." It was a Sunday, but for the Dalits, every day is a working day. Charles from the Dalit Social Forum told us: globalisation is of no real use to the common, hungry, downtrodden Indian. Another woman shouted "You tell us what you know and we will tell you what we know!" She and her fellow villagers knew a lot about ghosts and how they possessed people. They were aware of how spirits could keep a cloth dipped in water from becoming wet – their local godman had already demonstrated these powers. They knew about spontaneous roof fires, and they knew about getting healed through magical incantations.

Chandraiah then proceeded to create fire by pouring water on sand. He cut a lemon which gave blood-red juice. He dipped a piece of cloth in water and it came out dry. He broke a coconut and out came blood-red water. He performed every trick the local charlatans performed, and then explained how the tricks were done. He overturned a glass full of water, but the water did not fall, supported by a paper. Some tried to do it themselves. They soon understood that it was not a spirit that was holding the water up; it was atmospheric pressure. Chandraiah played with a piece of burning camphor and then swallowed it, claiming it was tasty, and the mood relaxed. Then to much excitement he made the children do the same.

It was a quick change of mood for a group of villagers who had until then been terrified that their children might be sacrificed. Soon the children were shouting with Chandraiah, "There are no ghosts! There are no miracles! We are not superstitious!" Sujatha mingled with the children and asked them about their talismans. She explained how hygiene was a better way of preventing diarrhoea. Meanwhile, Chandraiah made an old woman feed milk to a statue of Ganesha, in imitation of a shameful hoax that had fooled India for two whole days a few years ago. Soon, when some of the men said they agreed with us, I asked, "How many of you are ready to tackle the rascal who said that new school building asked for human sacrifice and caused you so much of suffering?"

We Will Defend Ourselves

Ten men and several children came forward. Because it was not entirely safe and as we had no security with us, we set out with just a few children and the adults. As we walked through the slush of the recent rains to confront Devudu Chandraiah, the goatherd who claimed to receive divine messages (no relation to our own Chandraiah!) we encountered many who were going to look for him in the temple and seek his blessings to cure their infertility or their sick children. His earnings were estimated to be about Rs 10,000 per week.

But word that we were coming had already reached him and he had disappeared. We had an altercation with his sister at the temple, questioning her about her brother's desire to see human blood. She denied it, but both children and adults who had witnessed his pronouncements said they had heard him say this. There were angry confrontations and we threatened that we would get them all arrested. This was a good day for the TV reporter who was able to capture it live.

Defence is built

We went back to the village, determined to spread the word that a group of Dalits from the village had decided to confront the charlatan (who came from a higher caste) and that he had fled the scene or did not dare to come because of us. We agreed that we would at the appropriate time print posters of the charlatan and display them widely so that his humiliation would be complete and the self-assertion of the Dalits would be announced to the world. *Spoorthi* also intends to file a police complaint against him for incitement to murder if they hear the mad ravings of this blood-thirsty charlatan again. But it will be some time before he will recover from the disgrace.

Our Relevance

We then moved to the school building itself where the reporter wanted to do a special interview. We met representatives of a well-known foundation organising a training program for literacy trainers. We were invited to join them, and to tell them about our work. But soon we found out that they were using a religious idiom to encourage the people to become literate, and that they were going to organise it in the context of *Bonalu*, a festival where animal sacrifice is called for, and where people swoon, become "possessed", and speak on behalf of God. They were of course against superstition and animal sacrifice, but Sujatha found this an inappropriate use of the religious idiom and said so. We had a lively discussion and it seemed to us that our point of view was appreciated. The original demand for human sacrifice had been voiced during a *Bonalu*-like festival!

We found this one of the most satisfying of our activities in recent times. While the preparation and organisation took a few weeks, the Dalit leaders found what they were looking for: a route out of traditional religious thinking and a forum where they could discuss these ideas. And in one single magical morning from amongst a group of cowering, frightened and terrorized villagers we found several willing to challenge superstition and confront the source of their terror. They do not need outsiders to defend them any more. They have found the resources and the strength to help themselves. We now have to nurture that new desire and ability to think for themselves and to defend their rights.

Courtesy: *International Humanist News,* November 2007



Why I Am an Atheist?

- **Bhagat Singh (1930)**

A new question has cropped up. Is it due to vanity that I do not believe in the existence of an omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient God? There is vanity in me in as much as our cult as opposed to other popular creeds is concerned. But that is not personal. It may be, it is only legitimate pride in our cult and does not amount to vanity. Vanity or to be more precise "*Ahankar*" is the excess of undue pride in one's self. Whether it is such an undue pride that has led me to atheism or whether it is after very careful study of the subject and after much consideration that I have come to disbelieve in God, is a question that I, intend to discuss here.

I deny the very existence of that Almighty Supreme Being. Here I want to clear one thing, that it is not vanity that has actuated me to adopt the doctrines of atheism. I am neither a rival nor an incarnation nor the Supreme Being Himself. One point is decided, that it is not vanity that has led me to this mode of thinking. My atheism is not of so recent origin. I had stopped believing in God when I was an obscure young man, of whose existence my above mentioned friends were not even aware. At least college student cannot cherish any short of undue pride which may lead him to atheism. I could not get any chance of indulging in such feelings as vanity. I was rather a boy with a very shy nature, who had certain pessimistic dispositions about the future career. And in those days, I was not a perfect atheist. My grand-father under whose influence I was brought up is an orthodox Arya Samajist. An Arya Samajist is anything but an atheist. After finishing my primary education I joined the DAV. School of Lahore and stayed in its Boarding House for full one year. There, apart from morning and evening prayers, I used to recite "*Gayatri Mantra*" for hours and hours. I was a perfect devotee in those days. Later on I began to live with my father. He is a liberal in as much as the orthodoxy of religions is concerned. It was through his teachings that I aspired to devote my life to the cause of freedom. But he is not an atheist. He is a firm believer. He used to encourage me for offering prayers daily. So, this is how I was brought up. In the Non-Co-operation days I joined the National College. It was there that I began to think liberally and discuss and criticize all the religious problems, even about God. But still I was a devout believer. By that time I had begun to preserve the unshorn and unclipped long hair but I could never believe in the mythology and doctrines of Sikhism or, any other religion. But I had a firm faith in God's existence.

Later on I joined the revolutionary party. The first leader with whom I came in contact, though not convinced, could not dare to deny the existence of God. On my persistent inquiries about God, he used to say, "*Pray whenever you want to*". The most important thing was the clear conception of the ideal for which we were to fight, as there were no important activities in the field of action I got ample opportunity to study various ideals of the world revolution. I studied Bakunin, the Anarchist leader, something of Marx the father of Communism and much of Lenin, Trotsky and others the men who had successfully carried out a revolution in their country. They were all atheists. Bakunin's "God and State", though only fragmentary, is an interesting study of the subject. By the end of 1926 I had been convinced as to the baseless-ness of the theory of existence of an almighty supreme being who created, guided and controlled the universe. I had given out this disbelief of mine. I began discussion on the subjects with my friends. I had become a pronounced atheist.

In May 1927 I was arrested at Lahore. The arrest was a surprise. I was quite unaware of the fact that the police wanted me. All of a sudden while passing through a garden I found myself surrounded by police. To my own surprise, I was very calm at that time. I did not feel any sensation; neither did I experience any excitement. I was taken into police custody. Next day I was taken to the Railway Police lock-up where I was to pass full one month. After many days' conversation with the Police officials I guessed that they had some information regarding my connection with the Kakori Party and my other activities in connection with the revolutionary movement.

In those days I believed – though I was quite innocent – the police could do it if they desired. That very day certain police officials began to persuade me to offer my prayers to God regularly both the times. Now I was an atheist. I wanted to settle for myself whether it was in the days of peace and enjoyment alone that I could boast of being an atheist or whether during such hard times as well I could stick to those principles of mine. After great consideration I decided that I could not lead myself to believe in and pray to God. No, I never did. That was the real test and I came out successful. Never for a moment did I desire to save my neck at the cost of certain other things. So I was a staunch disbeliever: and have ever since been. It was not an easy job to stand that test.

Because our forefathers had set up a faith in some supreme, being – the Almighty God – therefore any man who dares to challenge the validity of that faith, or the very existence of that supreme being, he shall have to be called an apostate, a renegade. If his arguments are too sound to be refuted by counter-arguments and spirit too strong to be cowed down by the threat of misfortunes that may befall him by the wrath of the Almighty, he shall be decried as vainglorious, his spirit to be denominated as vanity. Then why to waste time in this vain discussion?

According to me, any man who has got some reasoning power at his command always tries to reason out his environments. Where direct proofs are lacking philosophy occupies the important place. When our ancestors had leisure enough to try to solve out the mystery of this world, its past, present and the future, its whys and wherefores, they having been terribly short of direct proofs, everybody tried to solve the problem in his own way. Hence we find the wide differences in the fundamentals of various religious creeds, which some times assume very antagonistic and conflicting shapes. Not only the Oriental and Occidental philosophies differ, there are differences even amongst various schools of thoughts in each hemisphere. Charwak is still another independent thinker of the past ages. He challenged the authority of God in the old

times. All these creeds differ from each other on the fundamental question and everybody considers himself to be on the right. There lies the misfortune. Instead of using the experiments and expressions of the ancient Savants and thinkers as a basis for our future struggle against ignorance and to try to find out a solution to this mysterious problem, we – lethargically as we have proved to be – raise the hue and cry of faith, unflinching and unwavering faith to their versions and thus are guilty of stagnation in human progress.

Any man who stands for progress has to criticize, disbelieve and challenge every item of the old faith. Item by item he has to reason out every nook and corner of the prevailing faith. If after considerable reasoning one is led to believe in any theory or philosophy, his faith is welcomed. His reasoning can be mistaken, wrong, misled and sometimes fallacious. But he is liable to correction because reason is the guiding star of his life. But mere faith and blind faith is dangerous: it dulls the brain, and makes a man reactionary.

A man who claims to be a realist has to challenge the whole of the ancient faith. If it does not stand the onslaught of reason it crumbles down. Then the first thing for him is to shatter the whole down and clear a space for the erection of a new philosophy.

If, as you believe, there is an almighty, omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent God-who created the earth or world, please let me know why did he create it? This world of woes and miseries, a veritable, eternal combination of numberless tragedies: Not a single soul being perfectly satisfied.

I ask why your omnipotent God, does not stop every man when he is committing any sin or offence? He can do it quite easily. Why did he not kill war lords or kill the fury of war in them and thus avoid the catastrophe hurled down on the head of humanity by the Great War? Why does he not just produce a certain sentiment in the mind of the British people to liberate India? Why does he not infuse the altruistic enthusiasm in the hearts of all capitalists to forgo their rights of personal possessions of means of production and thus redeem the whole laboring community – nay the whole human society from the bondage of Capitalism? You want to reason out the practicability of socialist theory; I leave it for your almighty to enforce it.

People recognize the merits of socialism in as much as the general welfare is concerned. They oppose it under the pretext of its being impracticable. Let the Almighty step in and arrange everything in an orderly fashion. Now don't try to advance round about arguments, they are out of order. Let me tell you, British rule is here not because God wills it but because they possess power and we do not dare to oppose them. Not that it is with the help of God that they are keeping us under their subjection but it is with the help of guns and rifles, bomb and bullets, police and militia and our apathy that they are successfully committing the most deplorable sin against society- the outrageous exploitation of one nation by another. Where is God? What is he doing? Is he enjoying all I these woes of human race?

Do you ask me how I explain the origin of this world and origin of man? Alright I tell you. Charles Darwin has tried to throw some light on the subject. Study him. This is a phenomenon of nature. The accidental mixture of different substances in the shape of nebulae produced this earth. When? Consult history. The same process produced animals and in the long run man. Read Darwin's 'Origin of Species'. And all the later progress is due to man's constant conflict with nature and his efforts to override it. This is the briefest possible explanation of this phenomenon.

As regards the origin of God my own idea is that having realized the limitations of man, his weaknesses and shortcoming having been taken into consideration, God was brought into imaginary existence to encourage man to face boldly all the trying circumstances, to meet all dangers manfully and to check and restrain his outbursts in prosperity and affluence. God both with his private laws and parental generosity was imagined and painted in greater details. He was to serve as a deterrent factor when his fury and private laws were discussed so that man may not become a danger to society. He was to serve as a father, mother, sister and brother, friend and helpers when his parental qualifications were to be explained. So that when man be in great distress having been betrayed and deserted by all friends he may find consolation in the idea that an ever true friend was still there to help him, to support him and that He was almighty and could do anything. Really that was useful to the society in the primitive age.

Society has to fight out this belief as well as was fought the idol worship and the narrow conception of religion. Similarly, when man tries to stand on his own legs, and become a realist he shall have to throw the faith aside, and to face manfully all the distress, trouble, in which the circumstances may throw him. I have read of atheists facing all troubles quite boldly, so am I trying to stand like a man with an erect head to the last; even on the gallows.

Let us see how I carry on: one friend asked me to pray. When informed of my atheism, he said, "During your last days you will begin to believe". I said, No, dear Sir, it shall not be. I will think that to be an act of degradation and demoralization on my part. For selfish motives I am not going to pray. Readers and friends, "Is this vanity"? If it is, I stand for it.

'Belief' softens the hardships, even can make them pleasant. In God man can find very strong consolation and support. Without Him, the man has to depend upon himself. To stand upon one's own legs amid storms and hurricanes is not a child's play. At such testing moments, vanity, if any, evaporates, and man cannot dare to defy the general beliefs, if he does, then we must conclude that he has got certain other strength than mere vanity. This is exactly the situation now. Judgment is already too well known. Within a week it is to be pronounced. What is the consolation with the exception of the idea that I am going to sacrifice my life for a cause? A God-believing Hindu might be expecting to be reborn as a king, a Muslim or a Christian might dream of the luxuries to be- enjoyed in paradise and the reward he is to get for his sufferings and sacrifices. But what am I to expect? I know the moment the rope is fitted round my neck and rafters removed, from under my feet. That will be the final moment; that will be the last moment. I, or to be more precise, my soul, as interpreted in the metaphysical terminology, shall all be finished there. Nothing further.

(*Abridged version*)



Corps of culture

Wide womb of the 'Book' of scripture
Generates the substance of culture,
That acquires aura of spiritual holiness.

Turn the ripened, aged pages of the Books
Outcomes a sneeze through the nose
Caused by its reeking smell and
Tribes of flowerlike pests,
Delighted to be released.

Science progressed through inventions;
'We already possess all those notions,
So the Books claim; who can deny them
Their commanding merit?

Once a devotee had a tiny farm.
He sold his plough to buy the 'Book'
And read it through and through,
And all around the harvest grew!

One 'Book' says, 'you, my children,
Follow me like sheep;
I alone will promptly lead,
To the God, you want to meet.'

None to ask a question;
None to answer one;
None scrapes the rusty wrapper
Off his mind to clear
The layers of superstition.

White ants in their 'Books'
Rule over their great cultures;
And their traditions carry
The corpse of truth on their shoulders!

●●●

Darwin and Darwinism

-Richard Dawkins

To most people through history it has always seemed obvious that the teeming diversity of life, the uncanny perfection with which living organisms are equipped to survive and multiply, and the bewildering complexity of living machinery, can only have come about through divine creation. Yet repeatedly it has occurred to isolated thinkers that there might be an alternative to supernatural creation. The notion of species changing into other species was in the air, like so many other good ideas, in ancient Greece. It went into eclipse until the 18th century, when it resurfaced in the minds of such advanced thinkers as Pierre de Maupertuis, Erasmus Darwin and the man who styled himself the Chevalier de Lamarck. In the first half of the 19th century the idea became not uncommon in intellectual circles, especially geological ones, but always in a rather vague form and without any clear picture of the mechanism by which change might come about. It was Charles Darwin (Erasmus's grandson) who, spurred into print by Alfred Russell Wallace's independent discovery of his principle of natural selection, finally established the theory of evolution by the publication, in 1859, of the famous book whose title is usually abbreviated to the Origin of Species.

We should distinguish two quite distinct parts of Darwin's contribution. He amassed an overwhelming quantity of evidence for the fact that evolution has occurred, and, together with Wallace (independently) he thought up the only known workable theory of the reason why it leads to adaptive improvement – natural selection.

Some fossil evidence was known to Darwin but he made more use of other evidence, less direct but in many ways more convincing, for the fact that evolution had taken place. The rapid alteration of animals and plants under domestication was persuasive evidence both for the fact that evolutionary change was possible and for the effectiveness of the artificial equivalent of natural selection. Darwin was particularly persuaded by the evidence from the geographical dispersion of animals. the presence of local island races, for example, is easily explicable by the evolution theory: the creation theory could explain them only by un-parsimoniously assuming numerous 'foci of creation' dotted around the earth's surface. The hierarchical classification into which animals and plants fall so naturally is strongly suggestive of a family tree: the creation theory had to make contrived and elaborate assumptions about the creator's mind running along themes and variations. Darwin also used as evidence for his theory the fact that some organs seen in adults and embryos appear to be vestigial. According to the evolution theory such organs as the tiny buried hind-limb bones of

whales are remnants of the walking legs of their terrestrial ancestors. In general the evidence for the fact that evolution has occurred consists of an enormous number of detailed observations which all make sense if we assume the theory of evolution, but which can be explained by the creation theory only if we assume that the creator elaborately set out to deceive us. Modern molecular evidence has boosted the evidence for evolution beyond Darwin's wildest dreams, and the fact of evolution is now as securely attested as any in science.

Turning from the fact of evolution to the less secure theory of its mechanism, natural selection, the mechanism that Darwin and Wallace suggested, amounts to the nonrandom survival of randomly varying hereditary characteristics. Other British Victorians, such as Patrick Matthew and Edward Blyth, had suggested something like it before, but they apparently saw it as a negative force only. Darwin and Wallace seem to have been the first to realise its full potential as a positive force guiding the evolution of all life in adaptive directions. Most previous evolutionists, such as Darwin's grandfather Erasmus, had inclined towards an alternative theory of the mechanism of evolution, now usually associated with Lamarck's name. This was the theory that improvements acquired during an organism's lifetime, such as the growth of organs during use and their shrinkage during disuse, were inherited. This theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics has emotional appeal (for example to George Bernard Shaw in his Preface to Back to Methuselah) but the evidence does not support it. Nor is it theoretically plausible. In Darwin's time the matter was more in doubt, and Darwin himself flirted with a personalized version of Lamarckism when his natural selection theory ran into a difficulty.

That difficulty arose from current views of the nature of heredity. In the 19th century it was almost universally assumed that heredity was a blending process. On this blending inheritance theory, not only are offspring intermediate between their two parents in character and appearance, but the hereditary factors that they pass on to their own children are themselves inextricably merged. It can be shown that, if heredity is of this blending type, it is almost impossible for Darwinian natural selection to work because the available variation is halved in every generation. Darwin knew this, and it worried him enough to drive him in the direction of Lamarckism. It may also have contributed to the odd fact that Darwinism suffered a temporary spell of unfashionableness in the early part of the 20th century. the solution to the problem which so worried Darwin lay in Gregor Mendel's theory of particular inheritance, published in 1865 but unfortunately unread by Darwin, or practically anyone else until after Darwin's death.

Mendel's research, rediscovered at the turn of the century, demonstrated, what Darwin himself had at one time dimly glimpsed, that heredity is particulate, not blending. Whether or not offspring are bodily intermediate between their two parents, they inherit, and pass on, discrete hereditary particles – nowadays we call them genes. An individual either definitely inherits a particular gene from a particular parent or it definitely does not. Since the same can be said of its parents, it follows that an individual either inherits a particular gene from a particular grandparent or it does not. Every one of your genes comes from a particular one of your grandparents and, before that, from a particular one of your great grandparents. This argument can be applied repeatedly for an indefinite number of generations. Discrete single genes are shuffled independently through the generations like cards in a pack, rather than being mixed like the ingredients of a pudding.

This makes all the difference to the mathematical plausibility of the theory of natural selection. If heredity is particulate,

natural selection really can work. As was first realized by the British mathematician G H Hardy and the German scientist W Weinberg, there is no inherent tendency for genes to disappear from the gene pool. If they do disappear, it will be because of bad luck, or because of natural selection – because something about those genes influences the probability that individuals possessing them will survive and reproduce. the modern version of Darwinism, often called Neo-Darwinism, is based upon this insight. It was worked out in the 1920s and 1930s by the population geneticists R A Fisher, J B S Haldane and Sewall Wright, and later consolidated into the synthesis of the 1940s known as Neo-Darwinism. The recent revolution in molecular biology, beginning in the 1950s, has reinforced and confirmed, rather than changed, the synthetic theory of the 1930s and 40s.

The modern genetic theory of natural selection can be summarised as follows. the genes of a population of sexually interbreeding animals or plants constitute a gene pool. the genes compete in the gene pool in something like the same way as the early replicating molecules competed in the primeval soup. In practice genes in the gene pool spend their time either sitting in individual bodies which they helped to build, or traveling from body to body via sperm or egg in the process of sexual reproduction. Sexual reproduction keeps the genes shuffled, and it is in this sense that the long-term habitat of a gene is the gene pool. Any given gene originates in the gene pool as a result of a mutation, a random error in the gene-copying process. Once a new mutation has been formed, it can spread through the gene pool by means of sexual mixing. Mutation is the ultimate origin of genetic variation. Sexual reproduction and genetic recombination due to crossing over see to it that genetic variation is rapidly distributed and recombined in the gene pool.

Any given gene in a gene pool is likely to exist in the form of several duplicate copies, either all descended from the same original mutant, or descended from independent parallel mutants. Therefore each gene can be said to have a frequency in the gene pool. Some genes, such as the albino gene, are rare in the gene pool, others are common. At the genetic level, evolution may be defined as the process by which gene-frequencies change in gene pools.

There are various reasons why gene-frequencies might change: immigration, emigration, random drift, and natural selection. Immigration, emigration, and random drift are not of much interest from the point of view of adaptation, although they may be quite important in practice. It is natural selection which accounts for the perfection of adaptation, for the complex functional organisation of life, and for such progressive qualities as evolution may (controversially) exhibit. Genes in bodies exert an influence on the development of those bodies. Some bodies are better at surviving and reproducing than others. Good bodies, i.e. bodies that are good at surviving and reproducing, will tend to contribute more genes to the gene pools of the future than bodies that are bad at surviving and reproducing: genes that tend to make good bodies will come to predominate in gene pools. Natural selection is the differential survival and differential reproductive success of bodies: it is important because of its consequences for the differential survival of genes in gene pools.

Not all selective deaths lead to evolutionary change. On the contrary, much natural selection is so-called stabilizing selection, removing genes from the gene pool that tend to cause deviation from an already optimal form. But when environmental conditions change, either through natural catastrophe or through evolutionary improvement of other creatures (predators, prey, parasites, and so

on), selection may lead to evolutionary change.

Evolution under the influence of natural selection leads to adaptive improvement. Evolution, whether under the influence of natural selection or not, leads to divergence and diversity. From a single ultimate ancestor, many hundreds of millions of separate species have, at one time or another, evolved. The process whereby one species splits into two is called speciation. Subsequent divergence leads to ever wider separation of taxonomic units – genera, families, orders, classes, etc. Even creatures as different as, say, snails and monkeys, are derived from ancestors who originally diverged from a single species in a speciation event.

Since the 1940s it has been widely accepted that the first step in the origin of species is normally geographical separation. A species is accidentally divided into two geographically separated populations. Often there may be sub-populations isolated on islands, where the word is generalized to include islands of water in land (lakes), islands of vegetation in deserts (oases) etc. Even trees in a meadow may be effective islands to some of their small inhabitants. Geographical isolation means no gene flow, no sexual contamination of each gene pool by the other. Under these conditions the average gene frequencies in the two gene pools can change, either because of different selection pressures or because of random statistical changes in the two areas. After sufficient genetic divergence while in geographical isolation, the two sub-populations are no longer capable of interbreeding even if later circumstances chance to re-unite them. When they can no longer interbreed, speciation is said to have occurred and a new species (or two) is said to have come into being. It is controversial whether geographical separation is always necessarily implicated in speciation.

Darwin made a distinction between natural selection, which favours organs and devices for survival, and sexual selection which favours competitive success in gaining mates, either by direct combat with members of the same sex, or by being attractive to the opposite sex (these are sometimes called intra-sexual selection and inter-sexual selection, respectively, but the usage is misleading). Darwin was impressed by the fact that qualities of sexual attractiveness were often the reverse of qualities leading to individual survival. The gaudy and cumbersome tails of birds of paradise are a notorious example. They must hamper their possessors in flight, and certainly they are conspicuous to predators, but Darwin realized that this could be 'worth it' if the tails also attractive females. A male who manages to persuade a female to mate with him rather than with a rival is likely to contribute his genes to future gene pools. Genes for sexually attractive tails willy-nilly have an advantage that compensates for their admitted disadvantages.

The philosopher Daniel Dennett has written: "Let me lay my cards on the table. If I were to give an award for the single best idea anyone has ever had, I'd give it to Darwin, ahead of Newton and Einstein and everyone else." Comparative judgments like that are hard to make. But on one criterion Darwin's contribution surely heads the field. the sheer power of the idea, measured as the amount of explanatory work that it does, divided by the extreme simplicity of the idea itself, leaves one astonished that humanity had to wait till the mid nineteenth century before one of us thought of it.



My Belief in God..

My belief in God died forever on June 13, 1997, the day my two children died in the Upahaar fir tragedy. That was the last day my husband and I lit a lamp in front of God at home. We decided never to pray to Him again because it would not make any difference to us anymore. Whom should we pray for? When our children were alive, we used to take them to Tirupati, Vaishno Devi, Kanyakumari and other religious places. None of those trips to have any meaning anymore.

I don't believe in any Higher Power at all. When my children died, I had two choices – either to sit back, cry and accept whatever happened as fate or fight for justice. I chose the latter. I didn't want to blame destiny for whatever happened, if at all God exists, would He want so many people to die in such a brutal way? That's when I made a promise to my children and myself to punish those responsible for death.

People say life moves on, but only those who go through the pain know that it never does. I feel as if I have been served a living death sentence. All my friends and relatives wanted me to adopt a child, but I could never do it. They didn't understand my pain. That is when I realized that no one can help you and you have to deal with your grief on your own. I understand that when you are depressed, you need someone next to you. However, I think all others can do is listen to you. At the end of the day, it's your pain and you have to deal with it. I find solace in my children's room. I have kept their books, clothes and music the way they left it. I read Bhagvad Gita because it gives me a focus. It says " Focus on the eye of fish". I don't think about my future. All my desires died the day my children died. I am not happy with the verdict and I will fight till the end.

Neelam Krishnamurthy
(Neelam Krishnamurthy is the President of the Association of Victims of Upahaar)

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ASTROLOGY: ANTIQUATED SCIENCE

What is known as the Vaastushastra was the ancient science of architecture. It was developed at a time when steel was scarce and cement wan unknown. When there was no plumbing, no electricity, no toilets or any other amenities of the present day living. Yet a dabbler in that outmoded science of Vaastushastra is generally consulted along with a modern architect while preparing plans for a house. And invariably it is the architect who has to bow to the silly and superstitious nonsense of the so-called master of the antiquated science which, as in the case of all such sciences, comprises "a few pearls in a big heap of dung."

VR Narla

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DOWNSIZING FASCISM

Jalagav District Rotary Club had arranged my lecture on 4 Jan 08. Besides the Rotary Club, a few more colleges in Jalagav and Bhusawal also arranged the lectures in their respective colleges. The arrangements were in full swing at both the places. I was on my way to Jalagav from Pune by train. Suddenly at 9 pm my cell phone started ringing. The call was from Jalagav itself. The message was that the Jalagav Police had imposed ban on my lecture program. The authority had also cautioned the organizers to face the dire consequences if any one disobeys their orders. While explaining the background for the ban, the organizers told me that as soon as the lecture details were announced, a few local pro-Hindu organizations approached the police. They pleaded that Dr Dabholkar should not be allowed to deliver the lectures since he vehemently criticizes the Hindu Gods and Goddesses in his lectures by which the religious feelings of Hindus would be hurt. If Dr Dabholkar utters a single word against our sacred Gods the police will be held responsible for any disturbances. In the past, these fascist organizations just used to give warnings to organsiers of their discontent and pressurize to cancel the programs. This time they had gone one step ahead to bulldoze the police to cancel the programs. Rotary Club tried their level best to convince the police. But efforts were not fruitful. In spite of pleading and requests, police denied the permission to arrange the lecture program.

I had two phone numbers on my cell screen. One was of Hon. Home Minister RR Patil and other one of Dist Police Commissioner of Jalagav. I was trying both the numbers alternately. However the connection to Jalagav came through. The gist of my conversations with the DSP on duty was as under:

- Police Dept is expected to protect the Indian Constitution which has granted the freedom of speech to all its citizens. If any one comes on the way of this right, the police have duty to take appropriate action to remove the hindrances. However in this present case, the police are taking opposite stand. Hence they should realize their serious mistake and act accordingly.
- For last 30 and odd years I might have delivered more that thousand lectures. I had written hundreds of articles. I had also written more than15 books, a few of which have won awards form the Govt. Not even once I was found guilty for my spoken or written words.
- All the while I propagate the theme of scientific temper and secularism in my lectures, writings and through my organization which have also been mentioned in the constitution. In fact those who are objecting my lecture, they take anti-constitution stand.

- Police cannot impose ban on my lecture program. I will be coming to Jalagav. My organization has arranged my programs and I cannot disappoint them at this juncture. You may arrest me if you like. I will sit in front of your police station on indefinite strike till you grant me the permission.
- As a coincidence, I am contacting you first. Otherwise I would have contacted the Home minister. Then you would have been forced to take orders from your superiors to give permission to lecture programs.

This conversation was continued for more than 10 minutes. Police are not used to listen from the public and that too such one sided conversation. Even then DSP was forced to listen to whatever I was saying. DSP then asked me the topic on which I am giving the lecture.
"It is my personal issue"
"Please … as a friend, Doctor…" DSP
"The topic of my lecture is 'My Spiritual Apprehension' and I don't think this has anything to do with Hindu Gods or Goddesses."
"I will grant you the permission. I will see to it that no untoward thing will happen as long as you are in this place." DSP
"Thanks".

The phones in Jalagav started ringing. The newspaper headlines need to be changed. "The permission granted to Dr Dabholkar's Lectures" became the front page headline of local newspapers. The programs at Jalagav and Bhusawal were successful. Everything went smoothly without any incidence. The students and the public listened to me attentively. My activists were able to collect a good amount from the sale of ANS publications.

In fact this is second time after similar episode at Sholapur. Even then the fascists don't learn any lessons. I think they will never act rationally. I soon realized their irrationality while I answered the phone immediately after my program at Jalagav.

Nandakishor Talashilkar from Mumbai was on phone. He was speaking from Andheri Railway Police Station. He told me that Swapneel Taware, a young ANS activist, was selling ANS publications, booklets on Kurla Railway Station platform. While he was alone, a crowd of 40-50 people, taking the name of Bajarang Dal, VHP, Hindu Jan Jagaran Manch etc attacked him, threw the publications, torn the banner and mishandled him. They then forced him to sit in an auto and took him to nearby Andheri Railway Police Station. The leader of the crowd insisted that Swapneel should be arrested immediately for displaying the disfigured trident (*Trishool*) with lemon on the cover page of a book for hurting the religious feelings of Hindus. They were pressurizing the police to take action.

I immediately contacted Dr N D Patil and narrated the incidence. In turn, he contacted police and told "The publications sold by ANS have not been banned by Maharashtra or any Govt. When someone interferes the sale of books which are not banned, it should be treated as breach of freedom of speech. If police, on their own, tries to lodge a case, you will be in trouble". After listening to him, DSP stopped further proceedings. He refused to admit FIR against Swapneel as desired by the crowd. He suggested a meeting next day.

Meanwhile I talked with Home Secretary on this issue. He contacted the police. While we were in the police

station next day, the behavior of the police took 180 degree turn. They talked courteously. Even they offered tea to us. Only one person from the crowd, which attacked Swapneel, came to station. Police told him that police will not take any action. If desired he can do so on his personal level. He had to swallow his pride and had to go back. Police told that they can arrange protection while selling the publications of ANS. The police refused to take any action against miscreant crowd which attacked Swapneel. However one should appreciate both Swapneel Taware and Nandkishor Talashilkar for their exemplary courage to handle such grave situation.

It should be noted that we are aware of our mission. We are committed to scientific temper and secularism, the guiding principles of the constitution. As mentioned in the constitution we respect the religious feelings of others. In fact those who oppose us are supporting the concept of Religious Hindu Nation. They don't believe in scientific temper, secularism, democracy, non violence. Instead they take shelter of violence, vandalism, and false allegations to achieve their vested interest. There appears to be no hope of their reformation. Considering their attitude, we have to be more cautious and alert to counter their attacks and strategies. Our communication, our knowledge of legal implications, networking etc should be up-to-date so that we will not face ugly situations in future. If desired each unit should have its own legal expert who can assist us in difficult situations. We have to live with these fascists though they are being downsized. There is no escape.

Dr Narendra Dabholkar

V. R. Narla says:

Religion is belief in the unbelievable, dependence in the undependable, longing for what is phony.

Religion erects walls**,** communal, doctrinal, sectarian, castiest and other walls between men; humanism pulls them down.

Religion does provide solace to millions and millions of the poor and destitute, the sick and the suffering, the enchained and exploited, but it is based on the false promise of fictitious happiness in a phantom world of Heaven.

Prayer makes you a petitioner; thinking makes you your own master.

Life after death is no more possible than the running of an engine after the fuel gives out.

ON SECULARISISM - A SECOND LOOK

Secularism sounds sweet and means different things to different people. Indian constitution is said to be secular. It does not favour any particular religion. That is why Indian National Congress says it is secular. Hinduism is the most tolerant religion for ages. Toleration pervades Hinduism which, says Mr. Advani, it is (despite Ayodhya and Gujarat) a secular religion. If Hinduism is the basis of Constitution of India, the latter is secular. Therefore B.J.P. is secular. The Communist parties do not believe in God and religion. Therefore, they say they are real Secularists.

Before any one claims to be a secularist, he or she must tell us what he or she means by secularism. The term itself was in vogue from 17th century onwards after enlightenment. But the philosophy of secularism was in practice. The Church had an ubiquitous presence in all matters pertaining to State. As the people realized they should live according to the dictates of present day life, the importance and the power of the Church declined. Especially in the 18th Century, the US Constitution forbade the use of religion by the State. Thomas Jefferson said the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution erected a wall of separation between the Church and the State. This despite the fact U.S. as founded in the background of religion.

Soon after, the French Revolution took place and the Constitution mandated that there will be no connection between the State and the Church. This, despite the fact that, till then it was the Roman Catholic religion which dictated the Church all activities of the society and the State. Births and deaths had to be registered in the Church. Education was directed by the Church. Even awards by the state and land distribution had to be approved by the Church. By 1905, France had become a completely secular State.

Today even among the scholars and lawyers there is no agreement on what is meant by secularism. The word was coined by G.H. Holyoake. Fortunately, all the dictionaries, including Oxford Dictionary, give credit to Holyoake as the father of the term. Holyoake defined the term as an ideology, where in social and industrial morality “hitherto determined by reference to transcendental principles of religion were now to be determined by reason, and firmly anchored to the good of man in this life.” Incidentally it may be mentioned that atheism was not necessary for secularism, whereas Charles Bradlaugh, his close associate, said it was.

Etymologically, that word secular in Latin meant the great span of time or the spirit of the Age. Later, it got the present meaning that of "belonging to this world". Formerly, Christianity regarded spiritualism as a divisive factor in determination of truth and life of man.

However, explaining the denotation, D.E. Smith, studying the Indian Constitution, defined the secular State as "a State that guarantees individual and corporate freedom of religion, deals with individual as a citizen irrespective of his religion, is not constitutionally connected to particular religion, not seeks either to promote or interfere with religion". Analyzing the concept, Smith postulates three sets of relationships as follows:

- Religion and individual (freedom of religion);
- The State and the individual (citizenship); and
- The State and religion (separation of State and religion)

The first by implication excludes the third. A person is free to have any religion or not to have any religion. In the case of the second relation, the exclusion of the third factor is essential. A Secular State views the individual as a citizen and not as a member of any particular religion. The third relationship necessarily means that religion and the State function at two different levels – different areas of human activity. The separation of the state and religion is the most commonly recognized component of secularism.

Secularism, historically, is not an event. It is the product of a long line of evolution. In a secular society and under a secular State, people have moved away from Church and religion so that human activity in the field of education, art and politics are free from conformity to theological dogma and priesthood. Secular spirit is seen in the fact that the activities of the state are dictated and tested by reason, by experience and experiment.

The fruits of secularism are many. Since secularism treats an individual as a citizen and not a member of a religion, all individuals are to be treated as citizens and, therefore, equally. Each individual is a unit of secularism. The effect will be and should be democracy and equality which all people cherish.

Of course, Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy were also secular. They did not subscribe to any religion. And they did not subscribe to any ideology except fascism. They had no value system. Similar is the case with Russia. Secularism should be scientific, apart from being free from religion. The States mentioned above were not rational either. In this sense, they were not secular. Egypt, Libya and other states in Africa are in the narrow sense secular but not democratic. Though secularism proper should be and is based upon democracy and equality by itself. Secularism properly understood does not lead to democracy, though all citizens are treated equally unjustly.

D.E. Smith, of Princeton University, has made a detailed study of secularism in India. Many people including Smith regard India as secular State because the State is not aligned with any religion and all religions are allowed to exist side by side. No religion is prohibited. Various Articles in the Constitution permit use of religion. However no religious party is permitted under the Representation of Peoples Act. The Supreme Court

has in a case upheld dismissal of a State Government on the ground that it was religious. “Sarva Dharma Sambhav” is accepted as the principle of politics.

Various provisions in the constitution, no doubt, do not support or propagate religion. But they also do not provide prohibition of religion. The State functionaries indulge in exhibition of religion. As early as in 1959, M. N. Roy noted several non-secular and anti-secular features of Indian polity and society. “All profession of secularism is meaningless”, he exclaimed. He continued to say: “A secular State should not tolerate a vast, many million strong army of

loafers who outrage the ethical and aesthetic sense of its cultural and educated citizens.”
Today, the country and Courts have stayed away from strict secularism.

R.A. Jahagirdar

INTELLECTUAL DISHONESTY

As a nation, our main weakness is our intellectual dishonesty. This creates yawning gap between what we profess and what we practice. We say that we believe in one God and worship a million gods and goddesses. We say that what should really count is character and not caste. But we neither give up our caste nor marry outside our own caste group. We say that not only human life but all life is sacred, that we should be compassionate to all sentient beings. Yet, we treat a section of our own people untouchable and indeed, as sub-human.

And what is even more shocking is this: The more we are educated the greater is our intellectual dishonesty. Under the thin veneer of our modern attitudes, there is the thick crust of custom, of tradition, of superstition, even of primitivity.

V R Narla

SOCIALIZATION OF SCIENCE

Religion and science are both creations of human brain. The Christian religion taught man to see himself as the highest creation of god in his own image and the rest of the creation was for man's benefit. His home, this earth is the centre of the universe and the sun, the moon and all other heavenly objects revolve round it. In the Vedic philosophy every creature possesses a soul that is born again and again in species after species and eventually as a human being with a mind and a brain when he has an opportunity to escape from the cycle of birth and death. The Jews consider that they are the chosen people of the god. Thus all religions offer man the most important and prominent position in the scheme of things. Science on the contrary, pricked human vanity time and again. First it divulged to him that the earth, his home is not the centre of the universe but an utterly insignificant entity compared to the grand expanse of the universe. Next it revealed that man is no special creation of god but just a stage in the biological evolution of species, possessing many common attributes of living organisms and is dependent on them for his own survival. Then further research in human physiology brought to our notice that the human cells and cells of all other organisms have a lot in common and differ very little in details. Our Prabhu Shri Ram on killing Wali surreptitiously, defended his act as his kingly privilege of hunting wild animals which Wali, an ape was. But the latest discoveries tell us that the DNA sequences of humans and chimps are 98% identical. Only the 2% difference makes them apes and us human beings. Physiology of the brain and psychology tell us that human mind is not a special gift of god to man but is the function of human brain. And now the scientists convince us that the universe is neither created by any entity called god nor is it controlled or regulated by it; It has happened by itself (in a big bang) and goes on and on by its own laws without any governor.

Thus man is dragged down by science from his highest position that religion had offered him. But this position was in the first place an imaginary one and of little actual benefit to him. Man has to come to terms with this reality and adjust to it. But while dragging him down what science has failed to tell man is that although he is not the centre of the universe or a special creation of god in his own image, man is still at the centre of the society and all the societal institutions like education, governance, judiciary as well as all the amenities like communication, transport, health, recreation, etc. that facilitate his inborn urges like inquisitiveness, music, arts, play, etc. and make his life worth living. Natural sciences and social sciences have helped man to create these institutions that are continuously developing and making man's life more and more stable and enjoyable. He is gradually becoming aware of this reality. Helping to realize this truth and convincing humanity at large that with the help of science man can make his future without the help of any imaginary agency like god is socialization of science. It means taking science from its ivory tower, the laboratories of research institutions to the common man; presenting it in a language that he can follow and popularizing scientific outlook,

scientific method and products of science. It is making man more skeptical and less gullible. To do this, Scientists will have to step out of their ivory towers and reach out to the people. After all their science is born out of human needs and they are part of the human society. Their research should be in the interest of the society and not for its destruction.

Factors that hamper

1. Man craves for stability and certainty. He wants to know what is in store for him in future. Religion and occult sciences are bold enough to foretell his future and also tell him how to avoid or mitigate the effects of untoward incidents that might be in store for him as per their forecast, through prayers, rituals, penances and appeasement of angry deities. Science does not offer any such quick fix solutions. It progresses with the spirit of questioning while religion thrives on faith. To understand science one has to overcome his mental inertia and learn to live with ambiguity and endeavor to find, eventually, the answers to his problems. In religion there is nothing to understand; you only need to accept and believe whatever you are told. This is an easier path to follow and you can always hold your faith or god's will or the stars for your own shortcomings and failures.

2. Scientific knowledge provides man with a powerful technique of manipulation of the objective world. But unfortunately religious zealots and unscrupulous elements in the society with selfish motives quickly learn to make full use of scientific and technological inventions for self aggrandizement and manipulating other people. Science or scientific community is unable to prevent them from their nefarious activities, unless common people become aware of their responsibility towards prevention of such use. These manipulators of not only the technological inventions but also of nature and people have created untold problems such as consumerism, reckless exploitation of natural resources, industrial tensions, destruction of the ozone layer, global warming, weapons of mass destruction and criminalization of social life. Science is blamed for their entire exploits. These exploiters are neither scientist nor do they have a scientific outlook on life. They are quite often religious and staunch defenders of their way of life. They are experts in using scientific and technological inventions to spread their faith or their way of life, without reason and without consideration for others' views, opinions or faiths. Many leaders in power who have dragged their countries into wars are firm believers.

3. The protagonists of science have to accept that science as yet is a weak instrument to bring enlightenment in people's life. Despite the technological advantages that are readily accepted by people, the necessary change in attitude-the scientific outlook towards life- has not taken place. On individual level man is still ignorant, superstitious and even wicked. On collective level he is governed by tribal beliefs, narrow vision and vainglorious delusions mainly of the past. People are still very credulous and are enamoured of miracles, including a few scientists (who are eager to be present at the birth day bash of Satya Sai Baba, the lord of miracle mongering in India.) They are reluctant to investigate the purpose behind miracles. Satya Sai Baba's miracles, it is said, are very useful in laundering black money. The Ganesh idols in India (and abroad)

suddenly started drinking milk offered them by their devotees. It was Chandra Swami who predicted it and went in a procession to a Ganesh Mandir to demonstrate the miracle in Delhi. The media were present where the miracle took place and the news was broadcast immediately all over the world. People rushed to the nearest Gansh Mandirs to offer the thirsty lord their spoonful of milk. The timing was perfect. Chandra Swami was to be arrested for producing fraudulent papers of foreign bank accounts to involve a politician in some scandal. The famous Dhirendra Brahmachari who was allotted prime time on the Door Darshan, to enlighten people about Yoga and its miraculous effects died in a plane crash. He had many devotees, including a prime minister. After his death it was discovered that he was surreptitiously running a gun factory in a remote hide out in the Himalayas. Such objectives behind miracle mongering should be investigated and exposed. Scientific discoveries are much more astonishing than any of these so called miracles. But scientists demystify them explaining the natural cause behind them. The miracles performed by these miracle mongers hardly have any social objective to achieve and hardly bring any benefit to the society. The benefits provided by scientific miraculous discoveries are quite obvious and we all can enjoy them. There is another difficulty in popularizing the advantages of science and technology. It is the speed at which one invention after another tumble down on us leaving us unable to make any choice.

4. Science as an effective force in the human societies is of recent origin as compared to the influence of religion. Right from our child hood we all are reared in a religious culture where questions are not to be asked and doubts are not to be expressed. Science thrives on doubts and questioning and questioning even the answers. Such a scientific culture is yet to take shape. But it won't happen unless we persevere to make it happen. More over the changes can not be thrust upon from above. They have to take roots in the soil. The existing attitude of prostrating before every miracle and miracle maker can only gradually change into wonder and an urge to investigate. But like in the biological evolution, change can not be brought about suddenly. It has to be evolved out of the existing human traits and tendencies and habits. A science based society will take a long time to evolve.

5. The community action groups do not have conceptual clarity regarding faith and mythology. They criticize the culture, religion and mythology of the indigenous people. Instead they should analyze facts and appreciate literary and moral values present in them. (We should also keep in mind that the concepts of modern physics often show surprising parallels to the ideas expressed in the Hindu, Chinese and Japanese religious philosophies. Great physicists like Oppenheimer, Bohr, Heisenberg, Capra and others have not failed to notice and mention it in their writings.) The enthusiastic workers engaged in this activity are mostly from the highly educated middle class. They cannot declass themselves and their life style conflicts with the life styles of people among whom they work. They do not understand that people can think in ways other than their own. So mobilizing people for their own development becomes difficult. Many such groups are initiated and funded by outsiders, some heavily dependent on foreign funds and have to dance to

their tune ignoring local culture, local atmosphere, local knowledge and local needs. Their efforts produce anomalous results such as the bulls produced by strains of Jersey cows that tend to sleep in the Indian summer. Many times the goals of these groups are to serve the urban markets. In the name of science they introduce modern animals, capital intensive hybrid seeds as foreign donor agencies insist on their promotion.

6. Health has often not been valued as basic human right. Ill health is treated as static, individual and a biological problem that is to be tackled by the mystique of medical technology and not as intrinsically linked to the pattern of economy. Instead of developing scientific understanding of health, self care and increasing autonomy over one's own body among the people, government and community action groups are solely engaged in writing manuals and training paramedical and barefoot doctors and health workers dispensing expensive medicines which often do not reach the most needy. People are reluctant to surrender their healing to experts. Mainly because the western system that they employ destroys the indigenous system of folk and tribal medicines which uses locally available herbs and works without producing side effects.

7. Radio, TV and News papers do not benefit rural people as they do not deal with reality. They do not help villagers to understand their environments or solve their problems. They ignore their holistic oral models and folk rhetoric. Dramas, dance-songs, puppetry, slide shows and films are used by some community action groups. But villagers see them as curious remote phenomena that have very little to do with their immediate environment. 'Media is the message' proclaimed Marshal McLuhan, the leading Prophet of the Electronic Age, in the 1960s. But media, per se, can not bring about a social change. More appealing, convincing and powerful messages rooted in the experiences of the rural people are required to be generated and telecast to wean them away from superstition and credulity, ignorance and misunderstanding, fantasies and myths. They also have to be interesting, capturing the imagination of the rural people, keeping the profit motive in abeyance.

8. The current process of development is one that enables the rich and the more powerful reallocate the nation's natural resources and use modern technology to their own advantage. The lab tested, so called appropriate technology is imposed on poor farmers, neglecting rural artisans, local knowledge and their skills. The Tatas have a virtual monopoly producing ploughs and all raw steel material goes to them leaving the local artisans jobless. As far as the politicians and bureaucrats are concerned, they accept the need for social justice and spreading scientific outlook, the principles enshrined in our constitution but are too slow in implementing changes. More often than not they simply co-opt the new phraseology to please the pro-reformists and keep pursuing their orthodox socio-economic and cultural goals to retain their vote banks in tact. E.g. the Rajmata of the Gwalior state defended the heinous custom of 'Sati' and many politicians in power officially offer the first 'Poojas' to various idols at the time of festivals with all fanfare at the expense of the state exchequer or devoutly take a dip in a sacred river on holy occasions. They choose to ignore closing of the sick textile mills

rendering thousands of workers jobless and selling of the land owned by the mills for enormous profits that go into the pockets of the industrialists.

9. Organised science and technology (and its culture) regard all earlier knowledge as pre-logical and inferior. Indigenous knowledge, however, is not only of practical value but is also a part of an economics of permanence. Superiority of modern science is derived primarily from the political hegemony of its supporters. There is no reason why modern science can not be built on past practices that draw upon traditional thinking and cultural milieu. E.g. multi-cropping farming practices though less productive in short run, compared with high yielding mono-crops, are effectively self regulating. In addition this method is simple, provides ecological stability and ensures long term productivity of the land. Other traditional practices such as biological pest control and organic fertilizers are proving superior without causing harm to the soil or environment. Here we ought to clear one point. There is some confusion regarding what science should be taken to the people. Some even question the validity of western science. However we must keep in mind that there can only be one science. All science originates at some place or in some region western or eastern and people can and even are invited to dispute its content. But there can hardly be any dispute regarding the methods of science-observation, analysis, inference, experiment and so on and above all the readiness to discard any theory or findings as soon as they are proved to be false. What we must doubt is not the power of science but question its goal which ought to be 'making scientific knowledge accessible to all, reducing the knowledge gap between the poor and the rich and the control on the capital of knowledge by a few.'

10. Lastly the traditional concept of a good human being is a god fearing, law abiding person, meek and docile and happy in any circumstances. Being good and happy, they think, does not depend on anything outside a human being. He is self contained and self contented. The Hindu philosophy advices man to accept whatever status 'Anant' (god) allots him and to remain happy with it, not to complain about or to aspire for anything higher than what is given. So religiosity was equated with innocence, piety, morality, compassion, humility, being attuned to nature and all such virtues of a god fearing man. The human being with scientific attitude, obviously not having a firm belief in god and his omnipotence, on the other hand, is considered to be greedy, manipulative, aggressive and vulgar and one who tries to control nature and exploit natural resources, make war machines and indulge in mass killings. But the fact is that our societies are now getting more and more complex and interdependent. No individual can be self contained and self contented any more. In fact even in earlier days an individual human being, gregarious by nature, could not have been happy by and in himself. Happiness is a result of quite a few individual and social factors. And one does not have to be god fearing, meek and docile to be happy. Similarly those with scientific outlook and rational mind-set certainly do not deserve to be considered vicious in nature. As said earlier wars and war machines are produced at the behest of the power hungry politicians and never any scientists. In fact many eminent scientists are protesting against the

production of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and warning the politicians and industrialists about global warming and such other dangers confronting humanity. The religious zealots on the other hand are busy producing nuclear weapons and indulging in surreptitious attacks on other civilizations while the god fearing politicians busy themselves making wars for grabbing natural resources or foreign markets. In fact a rational human being with a scientific outlook is more likely to be responsible towards all human beings and the future generations and therefore more moral than the faithful who chooses to surrender his reason to the 'word' or some other intermediate authority between him and his god.

Taking Science to Society

Now that we have identified quite a few, though not all, factors that hamper socialization of science it will be easy, of course theoretically, to spell out what steps can be taken to do so. They can briefly be listed as below.

1. We will have to develop a new morality that will hold the modern society in harmony. Individuals will have to be much more tolerant and accommodative of traditions, cultures, and faiths other than their own. Scientific discoveries and technological inventions are already converting the world into one global industrial society. But psychologically the human race is not as yet prepared for such a transformation. Secularism and rationalism that will allow constructive criticism of religion will have to be actively inculcated from childhood. A lot of opposition will be encountered in this process. But the sane people in the society cannot shirk their responsibility. Many individuals and organizations in our country and abroad are already working in this direction but far more efforts are required.

2. Along with the constructive criticism of religion, exposure to latest discoveries and inventions is necessary. This however has to be carried out in the manner that ordinary people would understand. Highly educated individuals tend to underestimate abilities of common people. But experience tells us that those who are not science-literate do enjoy science fictions. It means that the possibilities of science and technology should be rendered in a jargon free language of the common people in an interesting and educative style. People should be convinced that it is possible to build a happy and enriched life here, in this world on the firm and realistic foundation of science. Unfortunately few scientists or highly qualified people are endowed with the ability of rendering their thoughts in a very simple but interesting language with persuasive illustrations. It will be much profitable to include developing this ability as part of the curriculum of university courses in various branches of science.

3. Exposing the miracle mongers and demystifying the miracles they perform is an important approach to socialization of science. Many rationalists, atheists and organizations like the ANS are involved in doing that. They also train teachers for inculcating scientific outlook among their students. Many exhibitions, poster displays, Science laboratories on wheels are used to enlighten the village people. But here one point ought to be considered. Efforts to socialize science in this way will not be successful unless the villagers' day

to day problems also are taken care of. Their ignorance is not the only cause of their gullibility. They are rendered powerless to tackle their problems and encouraged to leave every thing to their fate through religious preaching. An all out approach involving scientific knowledge of farming, agricultural technology, conservation and distribution of water, preservation of forests, easy access to markets, health, empowerment, economic-political-social exploitation and with the understanding of the local language, customs and traditions is required. In this connection the early attempts to educate the ignorant public in the U.S.S.R. are worth noting. Young men and women went out into the villages, to spend their life there. They learned the local languages, customs and traditions; tried to understand the villagers' problems; even married with the local inhabitants. With such missionary efforts the ignorant Russia became literate in a comparatively short time. What happened there after is not our concern right now. Here various agencies and Community Action Groups are doing piecemeal jobs scattered through out the country. They can at least come together on a common platform for education and reform and build up a network for co-ordinating their efforts working under their own banners. The network will help in:

- Keeping regular contact and updating of information,
- Exchanging information of how local issues are handled,
- Co-operating with government effort,
- Opening information centres in distant localities using TV, films, demonstrations etc.
- Helping each other in works like conservation of water, sanitation, etc,
- Opening libraries of books, films, educational toys and exchanging them,
- Discussing strategies followed by different action groups with the help of 'Panchayats' and local people especially women folk,
- Increasing interaction between urban elite and rural folks and much more.

5. The efforts of voluntary agencies alone will not suffice. The government, the industries, various educational and research institutions and professionals in all fields would have to fulfil their responsibilities towards the undeveloped areas and the down trodden people living there. They ought to know that increasing the empowerment and purchasing capacity of the poor is ultimately to their advantage. Industries instead of just advertising their technological products with loud claims should educate people how to use those products and offer proper after sale services which will ensure long term profits for their companies. Politicians should abstain from exploiting religious fervour of people and all religious organizations should be stopped from dabbling with politics. It seems that even the well qualified men and women need to be educated in the real sense. Of course there are quite a few doctors, lawyers and other professionals who thoroughly understand their responsibilities towards society and are quite actively fulfilling them. Some not so highly educated but extremely dedicated people like Anna Hajare although of a religious bend of mind are working with their heart and soul for the enlightenment and empowerment of society. This born fighter against

injustice took up the cause of exercising the 'Right of Information' on behalf of the common man. There seems to be a ray of hope as people interested in public welfare and the information technology join hands. In this regard, efforts of scientists like Prof Yashpal, Anil Sadgopal, Dr, Jayant Naralikar and many others are certainly laudable.

Many community Action Groups are already working in this direction. The Centre for Science and Environment is one such group in which journalists and scientifically informed people work to demystify science and take it to small towns and villages. They also intend to reach the information to the affected people regarding the development projects that often neglect their needs and their environment. The small and local or regional news papers which are read by majority in the small towns and villages do not have access to the news of development plans or what is happening in the fields of science and technology. In 1982, one such group with the help of grass root workers and regional activists, in Malaysia, brought out a report, 'State of Malaysia's Environment'.

A similar national report 'India's state of Environment' demonstrated that ordinary people have insights and if they are asked and given a chance, they suggest plausible alternatives to issues like rural-urban trade, forest products retailing stalls, grazing lands, soil loss and what not. So a combined action by media and scientifically informed people is very effective in popularizing science. Recently there was news regarding a student of a technology institute in Andhra Pradesh who invented a washing machine that worked with paddling of a bicycle wheel, with locally available material. She comfortably sits on the seat of the bicycle and does the entire house hold washing while reading her books. Many of us know that some innovative villagers run a broadcasting radio station for the local audience. In the World Wide Web we do get whatever information we want. But very few people in our country have an easy access to this facility and all of us feel the loss of our identity that is rooted in our locality and our time. Although it is not possible to create web sites and TV stations like the village radio broadcasting stations, there are people already trying to create Web Sites around this issue of bestowing back the place and time identity to people which they have lost in the all pervasive world wide net.

In short a socio-scientific movement, a social movement based on the philosophy of science is needed not only in India and other developing countries but the world over to transform humanity into a rationalist or a sane, science based society. This need not mean outright ousting of god or religion from human life for, that is next to impossible and also not necessary or urgent.

But the religious people too will have to be convinced that they have to learn to live here and now and adjust to the reality of this world instead of dreaming about the grand but unknown 'other world'. The key to this is science, more science and socialization of science.

Suman Oak

CAPITAL SUGGESTION

In 2004, India became the 3rd most attractive foreign direct investment desti-nation. Pakistan wasn't even in the top 25 countries. In 2004, the United Nations, the representative body of 192 sovereign member states, had requested the Election Commission of India to assist the UN in the holding elections in Al Jumhuriyah al Iraqiyah and Dowlat-e Eslami-ye Afghanestan. Why the Election Commission of India and not the Election Commission of Pakistan? After all, Islamabad is closer to Kabul than is Delhi.

For the record: Sabeer Bhatia created and founded Hotmail. Sun Microsystems was founded by Vinod Khosla. The Intel Pentium processor, that runs 90 percent of all computers, was fathered by Vinod Dham. Rajiv Gupta co-invented Hewlett Packard's E-speak project. Four out of ten Silicon Valley start-ups are run by Indians. Bollywood produces 800 movies per year and six Indian ladies have won Miss Universe/Miss World titles over the past 10 years.

For the record: Azim Premji, the richest Muslim entrepreneur on the face of the planet, was born in Bombay and now lives in Bangalore. India now has more than three dozen billionaires; Pakistan has none (not a single dollar billionaire).

The other amazing aspect is the rapid pace at which India is creating wealth. In 2002, Dhirubhai Ambani, Mukesh and Anil Ambani's father, left his two sons a fortune worth $2.8 billion. In 2007, their combined wealth stood at $94 billion. On 29 October 2007, as a result of the stock market rally and the appreciation of the Indian rupee, Mukesh became the richest person in the world, with net worth climbing to US$63.2 billion (Bill Gates, the richest American, stands at around $56 billion).

Indians and Pakistanis have the same Y-chromosome haplo group. We have the same genetic sequence and the same genetic marker (namely: M124). We have the same DNA molecule, the same DNA sequence. Our culture, our traditions and our cuisine are all the same. We watch the same movies and sing the same songs. What is it that Indians have and we don't?

Twenty-five thousand years ago, haplo group R2 characterized by genetic marker M124 arose in southern Central Asia. Then began a major wave of human migration whereby members migrated southward to present-day India and Pakistan (Geographic Project by the National Geographic Society). Indians and Pakistanis have the same ancestry and share the same DNA sequence. Here's what is happening in India?

The two Ambani brothers can buy 100 percent of every company listed on the Karachi Stock Exchange (KSE) and would still be left with $30 billion to spare. The four richest Indians can buy up all goods and services produced over a year by 169 million Pakistanis and still be left with $60 billion to spare. The four richest

Indians are now richer than the forty richest Chinese.

In November, Bombay Stock Exchange's benchmark Sensex flirted with 20,000 points. As a consequence, Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries became a $100 billion company (the entire KSE is capitalized at $65 billion). Mukesh owns 48% of Reliance.

In November, comes Neeta's birthday. Neeta turned forty-four three weeks ago. Look what she got from her husband as her birthday present: A sixty-million dollar jet with a custom fitted master bedroom, bathroom with mood lighting, a sky bar, entertainment cabins, satellite television, wireless communication and a separate cabin with game consoles. Neeta is Mukesh Ambani's wife, and Mukesh i not India's richest but the second richest.

Mukesh is now building his new home, Residence Antillia (after a mythical, phantom island somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean). At a cost of $1 billion this would be the most expensive home on the face of the planet. At 173 meters tall Mukesh's new family residence, for a family of six, will be the equivalent of a 60-storeyed building. The first six floors are reserved for parking. The seventh floor is for car servicing and maintenance. The eighth floor houses a mini-theatre. Then there's a health club, a gym and a swimming pool. Two floors are reserved for Ambani family's guests. Four floors above the guest floors are family floors all with a superb view of the Arabian Sea. On top of everything are three helipads. A staff of 600 is expected to care for the family and their family home.

Dr Farrukh Saleem
The writer is an Islamabad-based freelance columnist.

Shib Narayan Ray, Noted Humanitarian, passed away

Professor Shib Narayan Ray, doyen of Indian Radical Humanism died on 26 Feb 2008 at Santiniketan, Kolkata, India. He was 87. Oxford Publishing House brought the selected writings of M N Roy, edited by Shib Narayan Ray. He also published the full authentic biography of M N Roy.

Prof Shib Ray was in Melbourne University as head of Indian Studies (1963-81). He was chairman of Raja Rammohan roy foundation. Shib Ray was editor of Radical Humanist weekly and editor of Jignasa a literary quarterly from Kolkata.

He toured extensively in USA, Europe, and Asian countries.

Narisetti Innaiah

MAHARSHI MAHESH YOGI

Maharshi Mahesh Yogi, guru and tycoon, died on February 5th, aged 91 (probably)

Visitors entering the World Bank in Washington one sweaty day in 1987 might have been surprised to come upon a team of smiling young men, legs neatly folded into the lotus position, hopping like frogs. In fact, most visitors were probably not surprised at all. Like many happenings connected with Maharshi Mahesh Yogi, this display of "yogic flying" had been well advertised. The only surprise was that the bank, usually cast as a bastion of hard-headed rationality, should provide such a ready audience for an event whose aim was not physical fitness but world peace.

Thirty years earlier the maharshi, who had studied maths and physics at Allahabad University, had calculated that one person practising the transcendental meditation he promoted could induce virtuous behaviour among 99 non-meditators. He had already, in 1944, helped to get 2,000 Vedic pandits, learned followers of one of the four holy books of the Hindus, to chant mantras in an effort to bring the second world war to an end. He had again assembled meditators in 1963 to solve the Cuban missile crisis. But his ambitions were bigger—world peace, no less—and by the 1980s he had come to realise that to bring harmony to a world of 5 billion people, he would need 50m meditators.

Undaunted, he did the arithmetic again, this time factoring in meditation of deep purity and concentration (including yogic flying), and happily found he needed a number no greater than the square root of 1%—a mere 7,000 or so. Accordingly, 7,000 flyers were assembled during the Taste of Utopia conference in Fairfield, Iowa, in 1984. Annoyingly, though, the "wide range of positive effects worldwide" ended with the conference. Something similar happened after 7,000 students gathered for yogic flying and Vedic chanting near Delhi in 1988. The Berlin Wall came down all right and the cold war ended, but the money needed to keep the group airborne ran out and, dammit, "new tensions" started to arise in the world.

If only the maharshi had had the necessary funds. Actually, he had. He may not have known how to make peace, but he certainly knew how to make money. After years studying under a Hindu divine in the late 1950s, he had pronounced himself a maharshi (great seer) and set up the Spiritual Regeneration Movement. This took transcendental meditation, which he had trademarked, to the world, with Hollywood one of the first stops. Disciples paid $2,500 for a five-day course, learning how to reach a "deeper level" of consciousness by inwardly repeating a mantra twice a day for 20 minutes.

Real fame came when the Beatles beat a path to his door, seeking enlightenment and spirituality through good vibrations. George Harrison had already fallen under the spell of the sitar and the maharshi's message appealed to John Lennon's angry pacifism. Before long the Fab Four were ensconced in the maharshi's ashram in the foothills of the Himalayas. Their stay was only a modified success, though, with Lennon and Ringo Starr complaining

about the food, and all of them, perhaps, beginning to resent their host's transcendental interest in using them for publicity, if not an outright percentage of their earnings.

No matter. Plenty of others were ready to step forward for a dose of spiritual bliss, and not all were celebrities. In America meditation was judged to be just the tonic for a variety of people ranging from underperforming executives to recidivist prisoners. An army general even joined the board of Maharshi International University, set up in Fairfield in 1974. All in all, some 5m people are said to have been taught the maharshi's techniques since 1955.

His other ventures blossomed, too. A property empire was valued at over $3 billion ten years ago. A television station offered meditation courses to subscribers in 144 countries. Companies sold unguents, books, videos and Ayurvedic treatment. His political movement, the Natural Law Party, which in the 1990s pursued the goal of world government by fighting elections in America, Britain and several other countries, was less successful, and eventually folded. This, however, did not stop the maharshi then launching the raam, a global currency intended to foster development.

Imagine (all the things he didn't do)

Crank? Crackpot? Charlatan? Maybe all three. Yet the maharshi was generally benign. He did not use his money for sinister ends. He neither drank, nor smoked, nor took drugs. Indeed, he is credited with weaning the Beatles off dope (for a while). He did not accumulate scores of Rolls-Royces, like Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh; his biggest self-indulgence was a helicopter. Nor was he ever accused of molesting choirboys; his greatest sexual impropriety, it was said, was to make a pass at Mia Farrow. He giggled a lot, and plainly had no lack of self-esteem. But his egotism did not mean he was always wringing his hands at pop concerts or blethering at Davos; after the 1960s he seldom appeared in public.

Moreover, his message was entirely laudable. He did not promote a cult or even a mainstream religion preaching original sin, purgatory and the likelihood of eternal damnation. He just wanted to end poverty, teach people how to achieve personal fulfilment and help them to discover “Heaven on Earth in this generation”. And yogic flying, of course.

Courtesy: ***The Economist,***
Feb 14th 2008

A yogi can live in an air-tight chamber for days and weeks. But as a frog can do it for years and years, should it not be deemed a Super Yogi?

To annihilate the mind, as the yogi seeks to do, is to forego your right to be a human being**.**

V. R. Narla

CHITPAVAN BRAHMIN GLOBAL CONFERENCE

We welcome the Chitpavan efforts to consolidate their caste, instill in them the spirit of "caste identity" and fight for their rights. Every caste in India, particularly the depressed SC/ST/BC castes must learn from the Chitpavans and try to strengthen their respective caste identity. While SC/ST castes are pushed into endless confusions on "caste identity" every Brahmin and other upper castes are boldly organizing their caste conferences and strengthening their caste identity. Meanwhile the SC/ST castes, made unthinking morons, never find fault with upper castes open and defiant show of strength. But the same unthinking fellows rain all sorts of abuses when *Dalit Voice* recommends "caste identity" as the only way to liberation.

Look at the courage of the serving Air Vice-Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshal Bhushan Gokhale, inaugurating the Chitpavan conference in his full Air Force uniform. Brahmins are the country's most fearless community. Who can question a *Bhoodevata*? From where does the courage come? Courage is not for sale. You can't go to a shop and ask for Re. 1 worth of courage. Courage comes from within. Likewise, fear also comes within.

A Chitpavan Brahmin, brother of Nathuram Godse, was boldly living in his old Pune flat without any fear. When we met him we asked if anybody troubled him being the brother of the killer of the "Father of the Nation". He said none. Bhushan Gokhale too is fearless. No paper commented about a serving Air Marshal in full official uniform inaugurating a caste conference, which goes against the code of conduct of military officers. Neither the Defense Minister nor the Prime Minister had the courage to question a *Bhoodevata*. Did not the Chitpavan Godse kill Gandhi and defend his action in a book? Vidyadhar Date, formerly a senior correspondent of the *Times of India*, Bombay, and himself a Chitpavan who attended the conference in his article in the *Tehelka* (Jan 19, 2008) finds fault with such caste conferences. "This betrays a worrying increase in upper caste consciousness", he says.

But we welcome such caste conferences by Brahmins. Because in such conferences, the leader of the community will be seeking the unity of Brahmins". It is the very same Brahmins who also demand "Hindu Unity". Somebody may ask:"Will not he call for "Brahmin unity" go against "Hindu unity"? Brahmins must choose between the two; "Hindu unity or Brahmin unity".

Brother Date brings out one important highlight of the conference: Air Marshal glorifying the Brahmin Parashuram and his killer axe (*parashu*) by wwhich he annihilated all the Kshatriyas of India. Parashuram's fierce looking towering cutouts holding the *parashu* in a menacing pose were kept the stage and all over the conference venue. Another interesting aspect of the Chitpavan conference was it was attended by the top brains of the caste: academics, scientists, IT engineers, bankers, lawyers, journalists, doctors and the entire cream which day in and day out

harangue us that "caste is dead" and "the country's salvation lies in market economy". Why did the highly educated "leaders of thought" jump into their caste cauldron instead of the market driven LPG? Why did the Chitpavan leaders give a call to their youth to marry within the caste? Why did the conference decide to raise Rs. 1000 crores for the "poor among them"? Why they did not think of the "poor" in general? Because the Brahmins know that their *jati* is their "nation".

This is because the Brahmins (3%) are deeply worried about their getting drowned in the surging floods of "caste politics". The caste is killing the castiests. During Hindu regime of Vajpayee they almost succeeded in killing the parliamentary democracy that strengthened every caste. All the upper caste groups got drowned in the flood of parliamentary democracy which strengthened "caste politics". Yet the Brahmins managed to hold on and still rule the country by weakening the country's democratic structure and shifting real power to the higher judiciary, media, financial services, communication, art, literature, culture etc. Elected leaders have lost the real power which has passed into the unelected judiciary, services, media etc.

Chitpavans may be a tiny fraction among the country's 3% of Brahmins but the Hindu Party that controls the Hindu empire is their monopoly. Vidyadhar Date in his *Tehelka* report criticizes the Chitpavan conference agenda as it stressed "continuously of personal advancement of the community". Nothing wrong. Caste is an extended family. There is nothing wrong in a family leaders looking after its well-being. The problem comes only when a caste (or even a person) thinks that its well-being can be promoted only by destroying the well-being of another caste (or a person). All the upper castes (15%) despite being the country's rulers and the highly educated, do not know this. The struggle of the country's over 85% oppressed people comprising SC/ST/BCs and Muslim/Christian/Sikh is only against this 15% upper caste bid to prevent them from coming up.

When the Chitpavans exhibited their guru, the axe-wielding killer Parashuram fiercely staring at us, they are loudly announcing that they are against our progress. The Chitpavans like their *Jati* counterparts also exhibited their anti-women hatred. Date says "it is not surprising that women found very little representation on the dais". He also notes that whenever the killer Narendra Modi's name was mentioned the assembled audience burst into applause. Non-Brahmins, particularly the Bahujanas have to learn a lot from Chitpavan Brahmins, particularly their deep commitment to their caste and caste consolidation through "caste identity".

The ruling upper castes are fooling us by asking us to "forget our caste" but believe in market economy. The brainiest among the Brahmins have called the bluff of this statement.

V. T. Rajshekhar
Courtesy: *Dalit Voice*
Feb 16-29, 2008

MORE PLOYS THAT CAN FOOL YOU

"Alternative" promoters are reaching people emotionally. What sells is not the quality of their products, but the ability to influence their audience. Their basic strategies are to promise the moon and knock the "competition." To one and all, they promise better health and a longer life. They offer solutions for virtually every health problem, including some they have invented. To those in pain, they promise relief. To the incurable, they offer hope. To the nutrition-conscious, they say, "Make sure you have enough." To a public worried about pollution, they say, "Buy natural." For ailments amenable to scientific health care, they offer "safer nontoxic alternatives." And they have an arsenal of ploys for defending themselves against criticism. To gain your allegiance it is not necessary to persuade you that all of the statements below are true. Just one may be enough to hook you.

"We really care about you!"

Although being "cared about" may provide a powerful psychological lift, it will not make a worthless remedy effective. It may also encourage over-reliance on an inappropriate therapy.

"We treat the whole patient."

There is nothing wrong with giving due attention to a patient's lifestyle and social and emotional concerns in addition to physical problems. In fact, good physicians have always done this. Today, however, most practitioners who claim to offer "alternative," "complementary," "integrative," or "holistic" health methods are engaged in quackery and embrace such terms as marketing tools. Few actually "treat the whole patient."

"No side effects"

"Alternative" methods are often described as safer, gentler, and/or without side effects. If this were true—and often it is not—their "remedy" would be too weak to have any effect. Any medication potent enough to help people will be potent enough to cause side effects. FDA approval requires evidence that the likelihood of benefit far exceeds the probable harm.

"We attack the cause of disease."

Quacks claim that whatever they do will not only cure the ailment but will also prevent future trouble. This claim is false. Illness can result from many factors, both internal and external, some of which have been identified and some of which are unknown. Scientific medical care can prevent certain diseases and reduce the odds of getting various others.

"We treat medicine's failures."

It is often suggested that people seek "alternatives" because doctors are brusque, and that if doctors were more attentive, their patients would not turn to quacks. It is true that this sometimes happens, but most

quackery does not involve medical care. Blaming doctors for quackery's persistence is like blaming astronomers for the popularity of astrology. Some people's needs exceed what ethical, scientific health care can provide. Some harbor deep-seated antagonism toward medical care and the concept of a scientific method. But the main reason for quackery's success is its ability to seduce people who are unsuspecting, gullible, or desperate. Several years ago, a survey done in New Zealand found that most cancer patients who used "alternative" therapies were satisfied with their medical care and regarded "alternative" care only as a supplement. A more recent study found that only 4.4% of those surveyed reported relying primarily on alternative therapies. The author concluded:

Along with being more educated and reporting poorer health status, the majority of alternative medicine users appear to be doing so not so much as a result of being dissatisfied with conventional medicine but largely because they find these health care alternatives to be more congruent with their own values, beliefs, and philosophical orientations toward health and life.

"Think positive!"

Many quack promoters suggest that use of their method(s) will provide mental benefit that transcends the physical properties of their remedy. This is typically described with terms like "mind/body interaction," "mind over matter," or the power of positive thinking. A positive attitude may make people more apt to comply with an effective treatment regimen. Contrary to "popular wisdom," however, there is little scientific evidence that optimism or faith in a treatment causes people to live longer or to recover faster from an illness. Even if there were, it would not outweigh the dangers of misplaced trust.

"Jump on the bandwagon."

Quacks and vitamin pushers use several strategies to claim that their methods are popular (which may or may not be true), that popularity is a sign of effectiveness (which often is untrue), and that therefore you should try them. The popularity claim may involve endorsements or testimonials (which are inherently misleading) or statistics (which typically are inflated). The statistics can include the number of consumers supposedly using a method, how long the method has been in use, the number of practitioners administering it, and/or the length of time a practitioner or facility has been in business.

"Time-tested" or "Used for centuries!"

This ploy suggests that the length of time a remedy has been used is a measure of its effectiveness. Its promoters imply that if the remedy didn't work, it wouldn't remain available. Some promoters claim (sometimes truthfully, sometimes not) that their methods have been handed down from generation to generation, are steeped in folk wisdom, were derived from ancient writings, or the like. The falsity of this ploy is easily seen by noting that astrology has survived for thousands of years with no reliable evidence of any validity. Note, too, that many genuine methods survive briefly because they are replaced by more effective ones.

"Backed by scientific studies"

Since most people regard scientific evidence as a plus, unscientific

promoters claim to have it when in fact they do not. Their writings may list dozens or even hundreds of publications that supposedly support what they say. But the references they cite may be untraceable, misinterpreted, outdated, irrelevant, nonexistent, and/or based on poorly designed research. The classic example is Adelle Davis's book Let's Get Well, which lists 2,402 references. Many did not support her viewpoints and some were not even related to the passage in which they were cited. What should count is not the number of references but their quality and relevance—which the average reader will find difficult or impossible to judge. When talking with experts, quacks may acknowledge that "some aspects of what we do are not well understood," thus implying that other aspects are solidly based and the rest will eventually be substantiated.

"Studies are underway."

If no studies exist, quacks often claim that research is underway. If that is true, they imply that if their method were not effective, reputable researchers would not spend time and money to study it. If a genuine study fails, the quacks invariably claim that it was not properly designed. Moreover, in many cases, the research claim is a complete fabrication.

"Take charge of your health!"

This is probably the most powerful slogan in the quack's bag of tricks. People generally like to feel that they are in control of their life. Quacks take advantage of this fact by giving their clients things to do-such as taking vitamin pills, preparing special foods, meditating, and the like. The activity may provide a psychological lift, but believing in false things tends to carry a high price tag. The price may be financial, psychological (when disillusionment sets in), physical (when the method is harmful or the person abandons effective care), or social (diversion from more constructive activities)..

"Think for yourself."

Quacks urge people to disregard scientific evidence (which they cannot produce) in favor of personal experience (theirs or yours). But personal experience is not the best way to determine whether a method works. When someone feels better after having used a product or procedure, it is natural to give credit to whatever was done. Most ailments are self-limiting, and even incurable conditions can have sufficient day-to-day variation to enable quack methods to gain large followings. In addition, taking action often produces temporary relief of symptoms (a placebo effect). For these reasons, scientific experimentation is almost always necessary to establish whether health methods are really effective. Individual experience rarely provides a basis for separating cause-and-effect from coincidence. Nor can the odds of a treatment working be determined without following participants in a well-designed study and tabulating failures as well as successes—something quacks don't do.

"What have you got to lose?"

Quacks and vitamin pushers would like you to believe that their methods are harmless and therefore there is nothing to lose by trying them. With vitamins taken as "nutrition insurance," for example, many people feel as though they are making a bet with very little to lose and a great deal to gain. If a method doesn't work, do the

odds of it causing physical harm really matter? Moreover, some quack methods are directly harmful; others harm by diverting people from proven methods. All waste people's time and/or money.

"If only you had come earlier."

This phrase is handy when the treatment fails. It encourages patients and their survivors not to face the fact that consulting the quack was a mistake.

"Science doesn't have all the answers."

Quacks use this ploy to suggest looking beyond what scientific medicine has to offer; they also imply that since medical care has limitations, they are entitled to have them too. Medical science doesn't claim to have all the answers, but its effectiveness keeps increasing because the scientific method offers ways to find more answers. The idea that people should turn to quack remedies when frustrated by science's inability to control a disease is irrational. Quackery lacks genuine answers and has no method for finding them.

"Don't be afraid to experiment."

This advice is typically based on the cliché that "what works for one person may not work for someone else with the same problem." Although this statement is literally true, scientific methods enable us to determine which methods are most likely to work and which ones are not worth trying. If a barrel is full of apples that are obviously rotten, does it make sense to sample all of them to see whether one tastes good?

"Let's work together."

This ploy is used to portray quacks as "nice guys" while suggesting that their critics are not. "Since science doesn't have the answers," they may say, "let's put our differences aside and work together for the common good." That would be fine if they had something to offer besides empty promises. Proponents of "complementary medicine" (also called "integrative medicine") claim to integrate scientific and "alternative" medicine, using the best of both. Is it helpful to add ineffective methods to effective ones? Does it make sense to go to someone who uses the "best" ineffective methods? Is someone whose reasoning process is faulty enough to believe in such things as homeopathy likely to deliver high-quality medical care? Do "complementary" practitioners use reliable methods as often as they should? From what we have seen, the answer to each of these questions is no.

"Keep an open mind."

Quacks portray themselves as innovators and suggest that their critics are rigid, elitist, biased, and closed to new ideas. Actually, they have things backwards. The real issue is whether a method works. Science provides ways to judge and discard unfounded ideas. Medical science progresses as new methods replace less effective ones. Quack methods persist as long as they remain marketable. Even after they are gone, they still may be glorified. Open-mindedness is the willingness to follow where the evidence leads and should include willingness to defer to impartial investigations rather than one's own predilections. It is not close-minded to reject ideas that are unsubstantiated and lack a scientifically plausible rationale. Nor is it close-minded to rely

upon the vast body of accumulated scientific knowledge as a guide to giving advice or making practical decisions.

"Why don't you clean your own house!"

This type of statement comes up most often in debates between scientific and "alternative" practitioners, usually when the latter is not a medical doctor. Its aim is to portray the critic as a meddler or as someone with a grudge. The simple answer is that the shortcomings of medical care do not justify any form of quackery. Unnecessary surgery, for example, is an abuse of something that works and is entirely different from quackery, which is the use of things that do not work. Another big difference is that quackery is organized. There is no national organization of "Surgeons Dedicated to Unnecessary Surgery," but there are national organizations dedicated to quackery. Moreover, unlike members of the scientific community, quacks rarely criticize their own methodology or that of their colleagues.

"Prove me wrong!"

Quacks try to stand science on its head by demanding that their critics prove them wrong. Or they may say, "How do you know it doesn't work if you haven't tried it?" But there are not enough resources to test every idea that is proposed; for this reason, scientists tend to pursue those that seem most promising. Under the rules of science, the burden of proof is on the person who makes the claim. Unproven methods that lack a plausible rationale should be considered worthless until proven otherwise. Personal experience is not a substitute for scientific testing.

"We have no money for research."

When challenged about the lack of scientific evidence supporting what they espouse, promoters of quackery often claim that they lack the money to carry out research. However, preliminary research does not require funding or even much effort. The principal ingredients are careful clinical observations, detailed record-keeping, and long-term follow-up "to keep score." Advocates of "alternative" methods almost never do any of these things. Most who clamor for research do so as a ploy to arouse public sympathy. The last thing they want is a scientific test that could prove them wrong. If a scientific study is performed and comes out negative, proponents invariably claim that it was conducted improperly or that the evaluators were biased. Proponents of so-called "natural" products (dietary supplements and herbs) often complain that funding is difficult or impossible to obtain because the products can't be patented and therefore drug companies have little incentive to study them. That may be true for some products, but it is certainly not true for all. Think, for a moment, about plain, ordinary aspirin. Although not patentable, it has been subjected to thousands of published studies.

"I'm too busy getting sick people well."

Quacks use this response when asked why they have not tabulated their supposedly good results and submitted them for publication in a scientific journal. The key question, of course, is how can you know whether a method works without keeping careful score. The correct answer is that you can't. Even simple scorekeeping may provide significant information. In 1983, a naturopath

named Steve Austin visited the Gerson Clinic and asked about thirty cancer patients to permit him to follow their progress. He was able to track 21 of them through annual letters or phone calls. At the five-year mark, only one was still alive (but not cancer-free); the rest had succumbed to their cancer.

"They persecuted Galileo!"

The history of science is laced with instances where great pioneers and their discoveries were met with resistance. William Harvey (nature of blood circulation), Joseph Lister (antiseptic technique) and Louis Pasteur (germ theory) are notable examples. Today's quacks boldly claim that they, too, are scientists ahead of their time. Close examination, however, will show how unlikely this is. The ideas of Galileo, Harvey, Lister, and Pasteur's overcame their opposition because they were demonstrated to be sound.

"Health freedom"

Quacks use the slogan "health freedom" to divert attention away from themselves and toward victims of disease with whom we are naturally sympathetic. Quacks who insist that "people should have the freedom to choose whatever treatments they want" would like us to overlook two things. First, no one wants to be cheated, especially in matters of life and health. Victims of disease do not demand quack treatments because they want to exercise their "rights," but because they have been persuaded that they offer hope. Second, the laws that outlaw worthless nostrums are not directed against the victims of disease but at the promoters who attempt to exploit them. These laws simply require that products offered in the health marketplace be both safe and effective. If only safety were required, any substance that would not kill you on the spot could be hawked to the gullible.

"We offer alternatives."

Quackery promoters are adept at using slogans and buzzwords. During the 1970s, they popularized the word "natural" as a magic sales word. During the 1980s, the word "holistic" gained similar use. Today's leading buzzword is "alternative." Correctly used, "alternative" refers to methods that have equal value for a particular purpose. (An example would be two antibiotics capable of killing a particular organism.) When applied to questionable methods, however, the term is misleading because methods that are unsafe or ineffective are not reasonable alternatives to proven treatment. For this reason, we place the word "alternative" in quotation marks when it refers to methods not generally accepted by the scientific community and which have no plausible rationale.

Stephen Barrett, M.D.
Victor Herbert, M.D., J.D.

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Astrology and Astronomy

The Human race has always wanted to control the future, or at least to predict what will happen. That is why astrology is so popular. Astrology claims that events on earth are related to the motions of the planets across the sky. This is a scientifically testable hypothesis, or would be if astrologers stuck their neck out and made definite predictions that could be tested. However wisely enough, they make their forecasts so vague that they can apply to any outcome. Statements such as 'Personal Relations may become intense' or you will have a financially rewarding opportunity' can never be proved wrong.

But the real reason most scientists don't believe in astrology is not scientific evidence or the lack of it but because it is not consistent with other theories that have been tested by experiment. When Copernicus and Galileo discovered that the planets orbit the sun rather than the earth and Newton discovered the laws that govern their motion, astrology became extremely implausible Why should the positions of other planets against the background sky as seen from Earth have any correlations with the macromolecules on a minor planet that call themselves intelligent life? Yet this is what astrology would have us believe.

Stephen Hawking

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Open Challenge to Astrology

Barring a few exceptions, almost all societies in the world erroneously assume that astrology is based on scientific principles. This fact has been challenged time and time again by scientific communities of the western world. Indian scientific community however, has failed to take notice of this fraudulent business so far. ANS has taken the initiative and is now conducting a systematic scientific investigation under the able guidance of noted astrophysicist Dr. Jayant Narlikar, with the active participation of Inter University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) and Statistics Department of the Pune University. ANS has evolved a methodology to test whether astrology has any scientific basis, using statistical methods with help of statistical dept.

ANS has collected the required data of birth dates, birth places, etc, of 100 students studying in special schools for mentally retarded children, obtaining their parents' signed consent. ANS has also gathered similar data of 100 students, attending normal schools, scoring more than 70% marks consistently in all examinations conducted by the school authorities and therefore termed as intelligent by them. ANS is of the opinion that intelligence and mental retardation, the two distinct and prominent characteristics, of any individual determine the future of a person. Any astrologically based futuristic predictions should, therefore, reflect these distinct individual characteristics. As such ANS invites publicly all those involved in the prediction business, i.e. noted astrologers, astrology institutions, professionals in astrology etc, to participate in the scientific tests. ANS will send the details such as horoscopes, birth dates, places of birth, time of birth, etc., of 40 students chosen randomly to the persons/institutions willing to participate in the test along with the guidelines and assessment criteria. Based on the data provided, the participants are required to predict whether a particular data is that of an intelligent or mentally retarded student. If the predictions are 90 % accurate, then further tests could be conducted for those particular astrologers making 90% correct predictions. The predictions should achieve 70 % accuracy, to assume that astrology may have a scientific base; if it fails it can safely be assumed that astrology is a load of hokum. If, however, the predictions happen to lie between 70 to 90 % range then a retest can be conducted on a much larger sample.

The above information was disseminated in a press conference held in Pune. Dr Jayant Narlikar, Prof Kunte of Pune University, Dr Narendra Dabholkar and Prakash Ghatpande attended the press conference. This information was also passed on to almost all districts of Maharashtra through our network of activists. The enquiries have started pouring in. Statistical Department will test the

information submitted by using double blind testing methods. Those interested in participating in the tests are requested to contact ANS activists for further information and guidelines.

Astrology has so far failed in establishing its scientific credentials. No institution or a studious person of this profession has bothered neither to do any systematic research in this field nor to collect statistical data in support of astrology. Despite the fact, UGC has approved the conduct of courses in Astrology in some Universities and Colleges since it was insisted upon by the then HRD Minister Dr. Murali Manohar Joshi of BJP. The present UPA Govt. had promised to review this fact as soon as they assumed power. So far nothing has been done in this regard. ANS had recently revived this issue and had written letters to HRD minister Arjun Singh, Shri Prakash Karat and Shri Sitaram Yechuri requesting them to reassess the decision taken by the earlier ministry. ANS is on the verge of initiating movement in this regard.

In fact, the British Govt. is thinking of replacing the 'Fraudulent Medium' Act, 1951 with a new Act which will empower the citizens to lodge a case in the Court of Law if the predictions did not come true. If despite an astrologer's prediction of a happy marriage, the relation between the couple soon turns sour, the couple can go to court against the astrologer. The Bill will be passed in the House of Lords soon. The fraudulent professionals are naturally worried about their future and livelihood. It is a 40 million Sterling Pound business in the UK. It should be noted that the ANS has been demanding to bring the astrologers under the purview of the Law for the Protection of Consumers, for last so many years.

Examination of Predictive Ability of Indian Astrological Methods

Summary:
This summarizes statistical consultation regarding study design. The aim to is find whether classification of astrological birth charts (kundalis) into mentally retarded vs. mentally well-functioning corresponds to actual mental functioning in schoolchildren. ANS has a dataset of kundalis from 100 mentally retarded and 100 normal-functioning schoolchildren. I recommend a pilot study with the collaboration of astrologers (without blinding) so that they will determine the scheme of classifying kundalis.

- Also included are:
 - possible classification schemes that the investigators may choose.
 - analytical methods that may be used with different classification schemes.
 - discussion that specification of Type 1 error and Type 2 error is important (i.e., which is the default hypothesis, and which is the “novel” hypothesis). However, because of their approximate symmetry during numerical analysis all that needs to be specified is the level of Type 1 and Type 2 error, not which hypothesis they correspond to.

- discussion of the issue of "unclassifiable" kundalis because they are uninformative regarding the hypothesis.
- tabulation of acceptable levels of "unclassifiability", depending on how well the astrologers believe correct classification is possible among the rest of the kundalis.

Introduction:

Indian astrological methods attempt to correlate major life events with planetary positions in the sky at the time of birth (janmakundali, or kundali).

Hypothesis:

We hypothesize that information in the kundali as processed by trained Indian astrologers does identify mental retardation in children, which is a major life event in the child's life.

Aims:

1. To investigate the extent to which predictions based on the kundali correlate with the development of mental retardation by school-going age. Further, we aim to provide the level of confidence around the measure of association.
2. To determine whether the extent of correlation is compatible with random chance.
3. To determine the association planetary position variables marked as "key" by astrologers with mental retardation.

This study will be performed using a database of kundalis from 100 mentally retarded children (enrolled in special education schools) and 100 normal-functioning children (enrolled in schools for the general population, who have academic performance in the top **XXX%** of their class for the past three years running).

Optional Format 1:

We intend to perform this study as a study of mental retardation cases, and normally functioning controls, investigating the classification of their kundalis by astrologers as a risk factor.

Optional Format 2:

We intend to perform this study as a clinical trial of astrologers working with kundalis vs. random chance, the outcome being the accuracy of the classification of mentally retarded children and 100 normal-functioning children.

Note regarding formats:

Both study formats perform the identically same analysis. Format 1 is "a priori" friendlier to astrology, and Format 2, is "a priori" less friendly to astrologers, only in a matter of language. It may be important to your astrologer-collaborators.

Research Design:

Details of language will change depending on the format "case-control study" or "clinical trial". Both studies will have an un-blinded pilot where 10 kundalis from each group (20 overall) will be examined by trained astrologers in order to define the classification scheme for the kundalis. The remaining kundalis (90 per group, 180 total), will be classified in a blinded manner as per the scheme decided during the pilot phase. The classifications of the kundalis will be analyzed in a blinded manner by the study analyst.

Pilot Study:

The pilot study will allow astrologers to provide constructive input in the design of the definitive analysis. We expect one of the following schemes to emerge from the pilot study, given in order of complexity:

1. Binary classification: kundalis will be classified as (i) retarded, (ii) not retarded. The astrologers may choose to classify exactly equal numbers into the two classes, or may choose to classify an unequal number
2. Classification allowing "don't know": (i) retarded (ii) cannot classify (iii) not retarded
3. A more nuanced 5-level classification: (i) definitely retarded (ii) likely retarded (iii) cannot classify (iv) likely not retarded (v) definitely not retarded
4. A fully score-based classification: The kundali assigned a score from 0-100, where range signifies 0 as definitely retarded, while 100 signifies definitely normal. All intermediate scores, including fractions are possible.

During the pilot study, the astrologers will also give an estimate of the fraction of kundalis that are "unclassifiable". Because truly unclassifiable kundalis can neither prove nor disprove the main hypothesis, this will help in planning the definitive stage of the study.

The pilot study will also provide the opportunity for astrologers to provide deepening of the database for detailed astrological research. An example would be that for each kundali, the astrologer can give key specifics of planetary position.
For example, if the astrologer states that the Yuti of Budh and Guru in the Lagna is a significant observation, a database that notes the meridian of Mercury and Jupiter and the range of the meridians of the ascendant zodiac sign will be adequate, along with a binary variable for each planet, whether its position is of primary importance or not. Analysis will help future astrologers know which planetary positions are truly more important. This opportunity of advancing astrological knowledge will attract more serious astrologer collaborators.

Definitive Study:

(Type A and Type B errors, will be discussed later.)

The astrologers will be given the kundalis arranged in random order, with both groups of kundalis mixed. They will classify the kundalis using the scheme that they

have collaborated in designing during the pilot study. The appropriate statistical analysis method will be used to determine the association of the classification scheme versus the mental retardation status. A brief outline is given here.

1A. Binary classification of kundalis: A 2x2 classification, with equal number classified by design, the numbers will be tabulated as follows:

	Mentally retarded children	Non-Mentally retarded children	Total
Kundali classified as "retarded"	A	90-A	90
Kundali classified as "normal"	90-A	A	90
Total	90	90	180

The expectation of A by chance alone is 45. The actual performance will be evaluated using the chi-squared distribution.

1B. Binary classification of kundalis: A 2x2 classification, if the astrologers choose to classify unequal numbers, the numbers will be tabulated as follows:

	Mentally retarded children	Non-Mentally retarded children	Total
Kundali classified as "retarded"	A	P-A	P
Kundali classified as "normal"	90-A	90 - (P-A)	Q
Total	90	90	180

The expectation of A by chance alone is P/2. The actual performance will be evaluated using the chi-squared distribution.

2 Multiple-level classification of kundalis, the numbers will be tabulated as follows:

	Mentally retarded children	Non-Mentally retarded children	Total
Kundali classified as "retarded"	A	B	P
Kundali "Unclassified"	C	D	Q
Kundali classified as "normal"	E	F	R
Total	90	90	180

The expectation by chance depends on the actual values of P, Q and R. The performance of the tests will be evaluated using the chi-squared distribution.

3. Kundali "Score"

The distribution of the scores will be assessed. If the scores are normally distributed (bell-shaped curve) or appear to be the bimodal (two superimposed bell shaped curves), a t-test will be performed to determine whether the scores differ by the child's mental retardation status. If the distribution of scores is not consistent with a normal distribution, non-parametric tests of rank will be used.

Statistical Power of the study, Type 1, Type 2 error, etc.:

The issue of Type-1 and Type-2 error is thought to be a problem in this study. Specifically, the choice of which hypothesis is the "null" or default hypothesis, and which is the "alternate" hypothesis is a matter of dispute. The identification and interpretation of Type-1 and Type-2 error crucially depends on this. In medical research it is typical to label "no association" as the default or the "null hypothesis", and the association has to be proved. However, the default hypothesis may well be taken to mean "conserve the current state of understanding".

If the default hypothesis is "no association" and the burden of proof is on the hypothesis that "there is association", then:

- Type 1 error is if the study suggests an association, even if the natural truth is that there is no association.
- Type 2 error is that the study suggests no association, even if the natural truth is that there is association.

Quite the reverse, if the default hypothesis is "there is association" and the burden of proof is on the hypothesis that "there is no association", then:

- Type 1 error is that the study suggests no association, even if the natural truth is that there is association.
- Type 2 error is if the study suggests an association, even if the natural truth is that there is no association.

We bother about this because sample-based studies ought to be more conservative, than they are powerful, i.e., in case of equivocal results, the status quo, i.e., the default state of knowledge is preserved (Type 1 error in medical studies is allowed to be only 5%), while there is a slightly higher tolerance that we choose the default even if the alternate is true in nature (in medical studies Type 2 error is allowed to be 20%).

We suggest that this concern, though valid, is partly misplaced. The "no association" hypothesis is fully specified – on average 50% of the kundalis scored in any manner will come from mentally disabled, and 50% will come from the well-functioning children. All that needs be done, is that the "there is association" hypothesis be numerically specified. I.e., that the kundali classification will be 75% correct, or 90% correct or some such pre-specified number. As soon as both alternates are specified, most numerical analyses are for the most part symmetrical.

It is adequate to pre-specify the "level of confidence" (conventionally set at 95% in medical studies).

Given the sample size of kundalis, it is possible to define what levels of association can be separated from random chance. A crucial matter here is the number of kundalis that are labeled unclassifiable. These kundalis cannot support any of the alternate hypotheses. In that case only gross associations vs. will be detectable as different from each other, based on the actually classified kundalis.
The table below summarizes the level of differences based on how many kundalis are actually classified.

Numbers actually classified/not classified		Minimum detectable difference	
Classified	Labeled "unclassifiable"	"Random" correct classification	Prespecified actual correct classification
180	0	50%	61.1%
160	20	50%	62.5%
140	40	50%	62.9%
120	60	50%	63.3%-65%*
100	80	50%	66%
80	100	50%	67.5%
60	120	50%	70-73.3%*
40	140	50%	75-80%*
20	160	50%	90%

*The two different numbers refer to different "default" interpretations. If the default is the "random" chance hypothesis, the lower number is to be considered, if the default is the "true association" hypothesis or the upper number should be considered. In any case, the numbers are so close to each other, that the average could be considered.
As it can be seen, if a large number of kundalis are rejected as "unclassifiable" this study cannot be used to test the original hypothesis. Because the fraction of kundalis to be determined as unclassifiable will be determined from the pilot study, **this would be an important outcome of the pilot study**.
If the original hypothesis cannot be tested in the dataset because a large number of kundalis are unclassifiable, the dataset can be used for a secondary aim. This is to determine the fraction of kundalis that are unclassifiable (and its 95% confidence range). Whether or not there is an association between kundalis and mental retardation, the knowledge that a large fraction of kundalis are uninformative in terms of astrological predictions is a valuable progress to the field of astrology.
Thus the definitive analysis should be carried only if:
All investigators including astrologer-collaborators agree on (i) the maximum number of unclassifiable kundalis and (ii) the accuracy of prediction is at least of such a strength that will be detected based on the table above.

Dhananjay Vaidya

Rites, Rituals and Festivals

Last year, the Shivalinga at the holy place of Amarnath melted away due to tremendous increase in the number of visiting devotees and global warming. The intended demolishing of the Ramasetu is another such issue. The former is caused by imbalance in nature; the latter for sake of commercial interests. But both the issues and several others hurt the religious sensitivities of the Hindu Community. Whatever the politicians might regard them as, it is high time that we, the common people, religious or otherwise, belonging to any religion, should make up our minds and decide what we should learn from such issues, and to what extent we should let our faiths and religiosity take hold of our minds and brains.

Like other institutions religion too is a form of institution- the earliest one for that matter- that evolved out of the necessity for stabilising the society and is a part of its culture. Every culture has two aspects; the first is intellectually enlightening and the other pertaining to social conduct. The foundation of the intellectual aspect of Indian Culture was laid down by our ancient sages. They strived to progress from ignorance to knowledge. Their ultimate aim was the trinity- Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram- (Truth, Bliss and Beauty). In their endeavour to discern the 'Rita'- the universal laws governing Nature- they wrote the Upanishads and the Darshanas. The rebels among them stayed away from the maddening crowd and lived in forests to write their Aranyakas (literally meaning works written in forests). What these sages discussed, debated and passed on to the later generations was beyond the understanding of the toiling masses. The other aspect i.e., social conduct was taken care of by intelligent but shrewd and sharp men with very little consideration of the lofty philosophy of the sages. For a peaceful society they strengthened the social structure laid down by the Varnashrama System. This made it possible to amalgamate into one society the various tribes with their unique lifestyles, belonging to different races, religions and lands including small kingdoms spread all over the subcontinent. For moral rectitude of the masses they reinforced ritualistic devotion and belief. They wrote Brahmanas that gave a concrete shape to all rituals of worship and there by assimilated almost all tribes and their deities into the eclectic Hindu religion. They also compiled the Smritis in order to lock the society into one socio-economic-administrative framework.

With all these schemes and strategies, they managed to engender a peculiar mass psyche i.e. unsuspecting, uncritical belief and uncomplaining acceptance of one's lot. Each of us is influenced by this psyche even to day. Most of us accept the role assigned to us in the society without finding out if any change for the better is possible and faithfully observe all traditionally inherited customs and rituals. We are annoyed if any one causes any interference in these practices. It does not strike us that the cultural practices

aught to be informed and cautiously watched over by the intellect. The social conduct based on uncritical belief which is not restrained by intellect, leads to unrest in the society. It gets commercialized leaving no place for moral values and ethical behaviour that depends more on the conscience than on religiosity or religious dicta.

The western scenario is slightly different because the intellectuals in those countries turned to the study and research in mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, etc. Through their efforts the western culture overcame the stagnation caused by uncritical belief and became progressive. Their scientific outlook made life more secular. In India, too, there had been many astronomers, mathematicians, physic-cians, surgeons, etc. But the sharp Brahmins who compiled the Smritis and the Brahmanas did not allow the progressive scientific culture and enlightening knowledge to reach the down-trodden poor for fear of increasing their appetite for more knowledge and wisdom. They were banned from learning and were immersed in religious rituals and practice, Poojas and prayers, pilgrimages and festivals, observances and penance of all kinds so that they perpetually turned their sight towards the 'Other World'. Our outlook still remains "Other Worldly" because of our weak psyche and intellectual inertia despite the fact that the right of every Indian to education is enshrined in the constitution and many of us are educated.

We have got to overcome this weakness and inertia and start thinking afresh about our customs and rituals and especially those rituals and religious observances forced upon our women to keep them chained within the four walls of the home. All that is harmful and degrading to human dignity should be discarded forthwith, retaining the healthy practices necessary for emotional development. We must weigh up how much time we can afford to spend in the religious practices vis-à-vis our family, social and monetary obligations.

The Indian mind is not content with the millions of Hindu gods with additional gods of other monotheist religions, all dwelling in the other world. So we install deities in the earthly rivers, mountains stones, animals, trees, souls of the departed, ghosts, saints, fakirs and what not. Instead of conserving the revered rivers, mountains, trees and animals we ruin them in the name of religion. All the more annoying are the suddenly propping up temples of some 'Swayambhu' (self-born) deity in the shape of a stone smeared with red lead. The faithful gullible start worshiping the deity and the temple priest secures profitable means of livelihood. Somewhere else a beautiful cloth is spread over a road side tomb and it suddenly becomes very popular as a Peer that answers people's vows. In every religion there are plenty of Babas, Buvas, Bhagwans, Avalias, dead or alive, all with superhuman powers. This blind faith harboured by all Indians irrespective of the wondrous Baba's religion is the lone indication of national integration in our country. Religious fanatics who are out to cut the throats of

people of faiths other than their own eagerly look up to all these Babas for solace. They enthusiastically participate in each others' strange and weird religious practices and assimilate deities from other religions as their own. Those who advocate conserving the original pristine nature of their own religion do not bother about this intrusion of alien deities, Babas and rituals; on the contrary a conflict flares up if the administration curbs a ritual that causes law and order situation. For instance, when carrying coconuts and other stuff for worshiping Siddhivinayak was banned as a safety measure in Mumbai city, there was a great hue and cry demanding resignation of the Congress government. Do the politicians who demanded the resignation ever stand in the queue outside the temple?

One has to critically examine these senseless religious notions that cause a good deal of waste of all kinds and keep the minds and intellects of the common gullible people immersed in the intoxicating religiosity. We have got to adopt a rational outlook towards our religiosity and observance of religious rites, rituals and festivals. It is an important means of emancipating our women trapped in the quagmire of customs and traditions generation after generation.

The intention, here, is not to condemn all rites, rituals and festivals outright but to look at their utility, propriety and necessity critically and loosen their grip on the minds of people.

Suman Oak

Hindu Civilization on its Death Bed

While describing the plight of our country, Nobel Laureate V S Naipaul once called India "a wounded civilization". But according to S Subodh, the author of the book "Culture can Kill", the wounds are festering and would not heal. The wounded civilization is on the verge of death unless some drastic steps are taken. In fact, the question now is "how costly shall we make the funeral?" Apparently one will feel that his comments are very harsh and uncalled for. While whole world is praising this would be superpower (in the year 2020, 2050 ...2300 ?) why such pungent remarks to such a great country? However as one goes on reading the text thoroughly from prologue in the initial pages to comments in the end pages of the book, one realizes that what one realizes that what the writer is saying is undoubtedly correct from all viewpoints As Kumar Ketkar mentions in the foreword, culture has the broadest civilizational sweep as well as the narrowest identifier connotation. Indeed the term civilization is not regarded as identical with culture

S Subodh is not here for bashing anything connected to India or Indian - culture, religion, faith, traditions, rituals, scriptures etc. He has been perplexed and perturbed for quite some time,

particularly for last twenty years. He has seen his beloved country, India slowly degenerating into communal cauldron. He was searching for the causes of downfall of this glorious civilization. As an intellectual, he was offended by the mediocrity of the self styled Hindu educated intelligentsia. As a modem and secular person he felt that the country was giving up its magnificent past in the name of religious and cultural chauvinism.

Dr Anil Kane, who had written introduction to this book, emphasizes that whatever has been said in the book addressing exclusively to "we Hindus" is applicable to the entire mankind of all the religions without exception. Whatever may be the fundamental dictates of the religions, all the known religions have dogmas that require blind faith; idol worship has crept in, in some form or the other, All religions have considered women to be inferior without exception.

While writing "why this book?" author makes it clear that he has no axe to grind, no ideology to promote. In fact he has so much to lose and little to gain. But surely to light the flame of hope in the life of a billion people is an undertaking worth any kind of effort and risk.

Culture

Author has taken lot of efforts for in-depth study of this great Indian culture which is killing us , making us disabled to create or compete. Our traditional beliefs, values and attitudes are responsible for our condition. Fatalism, contentment, irrationality, obsession with spirituality, faith, elevation of poverty and renunciation etc are the causes of our disgrace. Author is not just giving his opinions since he knows that an opinion however passionate is not an argument. He invites the readers to approach the core issues in stepwise details to gain the right perspective.

Like an expert medical practitioner, he goes into threadbare details to arrive at correct diagnosis of the disease before making any suggestions of remedial action. Once we forget the hype created by media, vested bureaucracy and so called intelligentsia, about this country, what kind of India do we see in its heartland? Author describes a typical scene of worshipping a stone shaped statue of a Goddess, - Sheetaladevi, Santoshi Mata, Mariaai any name you can ascribe to it - in village outskirts. The ceremony is designed to appease these Gods/Goddesses though every one claims that he/she doesn't believe in superstitions; but very act suggests different thing. Orthodoxy, traditions, are still ruling the masses including the educated. The educated class feels that there is no point in flogging the dead horse. Author also agrees that there is no point in just flogging the dead horse but dissecting the beast. The dissection gives valuable insight into the diseases that affect this country - slavery to mindless tradition, sheepish one-track mentality and plain gullibility. Author feels pity and has been shocked to see how much of India is living still in subhuman conditions even in 21st century. Most urban India will not

acknowledge that we are backward. How do we explain someone who can't understand that he does not understand? who refuses to understand? No statistics will reveal their insistence. No proof will suffice to change their opinions. All the while author wonders that the most important amazing fact about our problem is: It is not that we don't see the solution. It is that we don't see the problem at all! What we desperately need today is courage to face our faults. Not to denigrate ourselves. There is no way any reasonable person can deny India's problems. But we conceal the problem with myths, the myth of our past.

Symptoms

Author has tried his level best to highlight historical events impartially on which the traditionalists build their dream castles. Surprisingly after a few incidences of glory, author finds that there is nothing much worth mentioning. Our history is not just a story of innocence lost. It is a story of being kicked, beaten and shot through the heart for a thousand years by scores of invaders. How many times has Delhi been burned and temples looted in India? We lost count. We lost wars, we lost territory and we lost our self-esteem. In spite of these records of all the lost battles still we feel proud of our glorious past. It is all wishful thinking. In fact our intellectuals and politicians believe literally in the history not knowing which is history, which is myth and which is mythology. The problem with the past is it blurs the future. It vitiates our present, befuddles our future and stops us from thinking clearly about our problems. Subodh is not making the sweeping statements but logically arrives at these unpalatable conclusions. Readers will no doubt agree with the author once they go through the chapters included in Section 1: the symptoms.

Author is convinced of the fact that there is no relationship between historical achievement and future performance. Like any share market conditions, the past performance is no guarantee for the future. However we Indians are very good at blame game. We generally assume that we know the answers, but are quite helpless. Instead of confronting the crises and taking responsibility for our infirmities, we faced our historical crisis with hands folded, blaming everything and everybody except ourselves. Foreigners did it. Fate did it. *Kali Yuga* did it. It just happened. We then start blaming politicians, corruption, illiteracy, poor leadership, overpopulation etc. The author has taken pain to explain his readers how flimsy are these reasons and how this brain washing of common people is rampant in our society. The blame game in which everybody blames everybody else for everything continues for ever and ever.

Diseases

In the next section on the diseases, author had tried to find out what might have gone wrong and where. According to him since our culture is based principally on our

religion and is an indistinguishable part of our religious experience, our problems have their deepest roots in our religion, spirituality and our excessive obsession with both of these. We are trained to believe in myths and accept non-reason. While pointing the shortcomings of this society author compares our society with other societies in the world. Surprisingly he finds a vast difference amongst them. Though other societies too were infested with religious bigots, traditions, etc, our society did not come out of the shackles of religion, tradition and faith, whereas other societies managed to throwaway these restraints long back. India was somehow left completely untouched by the momentous developments witnessed by other (western) societies - isolated, detached, unconcerned by what was going on. When the intellectual ferment was going on in Europe, we had many writers -poets and saints. We had no original thinkers or real innovators; no challengers to tradition but only those who illustrated and explained ancient theosophy. Religion by its very nature is anti-modern, traditionalistic, anti-change. We completely missed the boat almost 500 years ago by neglecting technology, creativity, productivity, innovativeness. What we missed was not confined to material progress alone; we missed the culture of progress, the ideas, the progress in the humanities. As medical professionals establish the link between smoking and lung cancer, author also tries to find the root causes for Indian regression by comparing with the American society. He concludes that cultural atmosphere makes all the difference. In America innovation is not an option but the way of life. It is a condition for survival, survival of job, survival of company, and survival of government. Author in fact lists out the differences between these societies and identifies the deficits of the Indian society. He concludes that culture influences the progress. Most people of India assume and assent in private that Americans are materialistic and we, the Indians, care more for love and family, values and the like. Author is convinced that it is not so. we have a lot to learn from it. When we compare our society with that of America we will find a direct contrast to what a successful dynamic society looks like. According to Subodh, there are mainly three reasons for this stagnant Indian society where everything stands still: status of women, educational limitations and caste discrimination. Though every one of us know these particulars, we are afraid to say so.

Author has arrives at these conclusions very logically. The dominance of a handful of high caste people over vast majority in the society resulted into culture of inequality. as a result the state suffered, society withered and religion prospered. Similarly the causes of the self-defeat - disunity, resource mobilization, beliefs and attitude - kept us in the last rung of the developmental ladder. While explaining the causes of the defeat in almost all wars fought for last 500 years, the author points out that we lack 'killer

instinct'. Fatalism, *Maya*, non-attachment, philosophical fantasies etc are the main causes of our failures in the warfront. there was no will to win. Instead we had pious wish to be released from this materialistic world. We pray and enemies slay us.

One will agree with the conclusions drawn by the author on our long-lasting affection towards spiritualism and ancient belief system. These are most damaging contributors to our failures in almost all the fields. All the elements in our culture - attitudes, actions, customs, traditions, rituals - are traceable to our over abundant faith in the spiritual matters. Rather than questioning the belief in vital matters, we coin new convenient definitions to make the facts to confirm our belief. Interesting thing about belief is, if facts confirm the belief the belief is strengthened; if facts go against it the belief is strengthened even more - that is the beauty of belief. In fact, religious beliefs are matter of faith, not of rational thought. However idol worship, Jihad, slavery, persecution, cruelty, mythology all have been rationalised at one time or the other by these religious zealots. In this process, the religion and the God became the controllers of the ethical values.

Author feels that there is a lot of confusion about values, ethics and religion. According to him when there was little knowledge, religion included everything under its broad canopy; science, logic, ethic, literature. Supreme God filled human needs. God, being unverifiable, is a great advantage since anything and everything can be attributed to Him without fear of contradiction. He lives in people's minds largely because none can prove that He does not exist. According to Subodh, ethical values need not be attributed to religion or God. Ancient societies utilized the God concept to advance much needed values like love, non-violence, family bonding and brotherhood. In our zeal to build foundations for these values mistakenly emphasize the means - God concept - more than the end itself - survival and welfare.

Causes

Based on the symptoms the author concludes that the society is suffering from diseases. The author then tries to find out the probable causes for the diseases. According to him, the causes are: ● failure to empower women ● caste system and a status conscious society ● restricted education ● wrong child rearing practices, authoritarian culture ● over abundance of spirituality and faith which were blocking creativity, innovation and rationality ● mythology trained people in credulity, non-reason ● isolation from the world, promoted by exaggerated notions of our purity and superiority.

A few distinctive beliefs in our culture have held us back for long. Our belief is that money is evil. We glorify the poverty thus encourage the hypocrisy. Unquestioning trust in Gurus discouraged independent thought and creativity. Belief in rebirth promoted harmful fatalism. When there were no

books, no schools, no internet, high importance was given to belief in teacher was natural and justified. In those days man had no knowledge, no means of knowledge, no accumulation of knowledge, no precedents. Three L's taught were lie low, listen and learn. After paper were invented it was read, remember and regurgitate - no criticism , no circumspection. We spent huge money on erecting stone statues and idols and temples. Even today while schools, hospitals and roads are strived of funds temples are flush with funds. We are in fact intellectually unproductive. Poverty steals our youth and spirituality our old age. Spirituality has become a high flying flourishing industry with its own management setup, seminars, study courses and Ashrams. Spirituality encourages fatalism. Fatalism is worst than laziness. It provides us with philosophical foundations to justify our laziness and failures. Our culture discourages innovation and independent thinking. There is basic hostility to accept anything new. Our civic sense, civility, morality all are confined to our close circle of family and friends only, no others. We have only one vision, tunnel vision which can move only backward direction. With all these negative feedbacks author is sure about no improvement in our society is possible without upheaval of religion. Scratch a Hindu and you will find a philosopher. Our tryst with tradition, culture and religion had reared ignorance, ambiguity and doubts about the physical world and its reality.

While discussing about religion-infested society, author was not able to decide what can be called religion and what is mere sect, cult or faith in powerful personalities. Hindu religion is mix of all these things; there is no simple way to decide. Karma theory which is the core of Hindu religion had let us down on every front. In fact author feels that there is nothing like personal God, soul and rebirth except through faith. Author quotes George Graham, a noted psychologist in verbatim: "Religious hallucinations are quite common in schizophrenic people. they are signs of illness, not religious sight. It is no easy thing to distinguish between mental illness and religious insight".

Interpretation of Hindu religious texts is a matter of huge controversy and recrimination. Language of these texts is used to confuse, obfuscate or evade issues. In fact a beautiful (?) poetry has been mistaken for philosophical truth. Meaning of words and syntax change from person to person and from time to time. Word *Dharma* has multiple connotations and can be used the way you would like to use. It is amazing to see how many Hindu philosophers wriggle out of intractable theosophical problems through the simple expedient of amending, refining, redefining, bending, stretching, changing or questioning the meaning of simple words. Rituals and limitless faith that violate common sense dominate Hindu religion. Ritual is an integral and inseparable part of Hindu religious ethos ever since the sacrificial fires of the *Vedas*. Author cites the *Gita* as an

example contradictory statements, misinterpretations and ambiguous testimonials. That is why the author feels Hindu religion as religion of losers.

A society which thinks that intelligence is a handicap and undesirable, is surely paving the path of decline. Pious people in India believe that intelligence is a hindrance in matter of religion. To them reason or even skepticism is not only undesirable; it is an unmitigated evil. They all have a distrust of intellect. According to them mental derangement itself is somehow holy if only accompanied by kindness and humility. Though on one hand the modern Hindu says that he doesn't believe in myths yet he often believes health fads, rumour mongering, political gossip, astrology, pseudo-science.

Author attacks pseudo-scientific nature of religion. Nowadays it has become fashionable to make tall claims about scientific nature of Hindu religion, to include a sprinkling of modern scientific words to impress the educated reader, and then merrily present the most controversial assumptions as universal truths; how the Vedas knew quantum physics, how the soul is pure light, energy, entropy, or whatever. In India, a Guru will espouse faith, ethics and devotion. In America he will emphasize intelligence, science and knowledge.

In fact the logic by which Hindu religion functions has been correctly rechristened as Hinductive logic which is neither inductive nor deductive. Author quotes many interesting and amusing examples in support of this newly coined word for typical Hindu logic. While summing up the discussions on root causes of failures author mentions that technology can make us smarter but it cannot make us smart. It can extend our reach but it cannot teach us how to think. So modernisation in the physical sense alone is not enough. We need to modernize our minds too. If our values are not clear, rational and balanced; if they contradict natural instinct; if they are self defeating; no amount of technological progress will help us.

Remedies

Author regrets at slow pace of modernisation of Indian society. The change is too little, too late. Most of the times, change is local, superficial and involuntary. Today we dress in western modes but we wear Indian culture over our sleeves and also it is deep within our hearts. We need real and immediate modernisation. Real modernisation is modernisation of attitudes, belief and values. Modernisation per se, will not make us rational unless we ourselves learn to be rational. If we compare ourselves with other modern societies we are learned, they are intelligent; we are reproductive, they are creative. Now it is high time to break the bonds of religious tyranny completely. We should treat religion as an irrelevance on public life. We need not continue to love the cobwebs that surround us - holy stones, holy places, scriptures, sacred threads, Ganga water, cow urine, etc. The relentless retelling of epic tales

to adults must end. Meaningless debates and discussions or interpretation of scriptural stories and statements serve no useful purpose. Nostalgia for the past is not going to do any good. We must break the vicious circle of self-fulfilling deflation of expectations and achievements. While we have time to turn around we do not have unlimited time. While religion ruled the dark ages, reason must rule the computer age.

Author is very clear in his mind about the future line of action to mend our ways and improve our life. He had pinned his hopes on the intellectuals and elite class of the society. Unless this class changes, the society will not change since rest of the population follows this class. As he rightly puts it: "We in India today are a society of conflict thinkers in uneven transition and mixed messages. Imposition of a western culture on an ancient tradition and childhood conditioning has created a kind of perplexed elite. Those elite are always wondering about which direction to take. Although they may have a compass, its needle keeps flickering constantly. They are so to say, strangers to themselves; yet they themselves may not always no clearly. The same considerations apply to our younger generation in India today; and to the bright boys and girls. "

As author mentions rightly, this book is not presenting the theory that neither fate nor foreigners nor genes, nor sins caused our demise as a strong nation and our degradation into depth of destitution. We ourselves are responsible for our fall. But we are not dumb. It is now left to us whether to abandon the past completely, make a clean sweep and start afresh with the new ideas, new thoughts, rational attitudes and technological innovations. The book has displayed what we are and what we should be. The book is an eye opener to all of us and it has also strengthened some of our views about the path in which we have to proceed. Let us hope we will fulfill the wish of the author of this book.

Prabhakar Nanawaty

Culture can Kill
by S. Subodh
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God: An Interesting and Factual Dialogue

My close friend, a staunch theist, once came to me and put an urgent question to me:
"Do you believe in the existence of God?"
"Please tell me what your idea of God is?", I asked him.
"Why do you want it?", his impatient question.
"Because I don't know it", my reply.
"Well, God is the creator of this creation", his answer.
"By creator and creation, you mean God and universe, right?", my question.
"Yes", said he.
"That means God and universe are two distinct entities, are they?", my question. He replied in the positive. I then asked him,
"Can you tell me where the universe begins and where it ends?". He said, "No".
"If you can't tell this where does your God stay outside this universe?", was my inquiry. He was obviously nonplussed! But with a view not to be outwitted, he said, "God occupies the whole universe".

"If he is a person, is this NOT just impossible?", was my question.
"And does this reconcile with his statements in *Bhagvadgeeta* that he stays in human heart, in one place, in this book and also in the human digestive system in the book?". He was once again at his wit's end!

"Secondly" I said, "

Adya Shankaracharya has very clearly stated that *NIRMATA* and *NIRMITI* are NOT two separate entities but one. This is well known as an *Advait Siddhanta*, which clearly points finger to the '*swayambhootva*' (self-creation) of this universe. Even one Upanishad upholds this theory. Goudpadacharya, the preceptor of Adya Shankaracharya also propounded "*Ajatavad*" which means this universe is *Ajat* - not created. It is existing without a creator. Of the nine *Rishis* of remote past who wrote nine *Darshanas* (School of philosophy) seven have rejected God. About the remaining two also, while some thinkers point out they too are atheistic, though others do not agree with them. It is however very clear that Indian philosophy is remarkably denier of God. If you still want to believe in this as 90 % of the people do, well, you may do so, obviously hugging a falsehood".

My friend was overwhelmed and yet said, "Do you think then, that man can live without God, who, he feels, comes to help him in his difficulties?"
"Which God, of which religion has so far done so, except in mythological stories which are fake? Man suffers from poverty, exploitation, rapes, robberies and many other evils of their ilk. Has God relieved man from any of these sufferings in the entire history of humanity? If you feel God has still to be believed, you have to metamorphose his

concept of the creator of this universe", said I.
"Have you any idea, really?" my friend asked me breathlessly!
"Yes, I do have one", said I, "This God can be seen by every person in the whole world; and this God demolishes ALL manmade differences of all religions and makes man a real man!" was my reply.

"What is this fine idea?", asked he impatiently!
Listen, my dear friend," said I "It is 'NATURE', feminine in English and rightly called 'kind mother', who expects no prayers, worships, waving of lamps by man. She expects man to follow her rules, failing which she punishes too, in proportion to his failure of observing her rules. The punishment is prompt without reference to either previous or next birth as is with God and religion," was my reply.

"Oh, this is marvelous," he ejaculated with joy and bent to touch my feet with words, "Please make me your disciple". I said immediately, "Please do not touch my feet and do not make me your Guru too." He was in tears! "Why, why," he almost shouted!
"There are two reasons," I said, " although you are impressed by my positing, please do not forget I too can still commit errors. The old proverb says: it is human to err. Once you make me your Guru, you will stop detecting my errors; and nod your head to whatever I say, without subjecting it to critical scanning. Secondly, I have not made anyone my Guru, I follow in his footsteps, though only when I am convinced about what he preaches. You should, I insist, follow suit. One more thing I want to tell you with emphasis is that I have become a Radical Humanist too, a theory pioneered by that great thinker, Shri M.N. Roy, who was a strict 'Reasonist' and abhorred 'Faithism' for its untenable tenets. You too should think seriously about this".
"I will", he promised and went home. After about a month, I heard about his sad demise!

90% of our 'faithists' do not know our proud heritage of 'Reasonism' and blindly follow the out-dated rules of religion and spiritualism. Although I wish their transformation Sharp, I am not hopeful of seeing the revolution in my life, now that I am 85!
May reason triumph!

Y. J. Mahabal

Thoughts on Call Centre Employee's Murder

Delia Maria writes:

The light for Diwalli has gone out for me after reading the local newspapers the last two days about the rape and brutal murder of the young call centre employee Jyotikumari Chaudhary. I am shocked that not only do women of my city now have to work night shifts, but they must also have to face the possibility of extortion, rape and murder as an added occupational hazard!

The rape of Jyotikumari Chaudhary is yet another dimension of how this industry will destroy the life and safety of citizens in this city. It is a wake-up call to all of us women that it is becoming unsafe to move around at night. It is time that women's groups take up the issue with the RTO, the Police and the government to put pressure on call centres on these issues.

- *warn the cabbies against speeding and confiscate their license if they do so*
- *ensure that women do not travel alone in the cabs no matter what the work pressures be*

The author replies to the points raised by Delia Maria:

In my opinion, your reaction is more emotional than intellectual, which naturally because of the rape and death of the poor girl Jyoti. Rape is a cruel and inhuman and despicable act. I too am disheartened at the rape and murder of Jyoti. In your youth and childhood, and my youth and childhood, had we ever seen women go out after 10 o'clock at night even for night duty (other than nurses)? Now, in the IT industry women and girls fearlessly go out at any hour of the night. We never thought of it in our dreams. So, from such an environment as night duty for women on a large scale, problems are likely to take place, which can take place in any industry and any society. No matter what checks you put, crime will find a way.

Not only in the call centre industry but in any industry, any society, there are problems for women. The government has to think about these too. Many women who work in STD booths, xerox shops, small school teachers, lawyers office workers, salesgirls, tuition teachers, dispensary staff, nurses, ayahs, domestic servants, etc. are paid Rupees 1,000 to 3,000 a month. The salary is used up in their travel itself. That is why even their marriages are delayed. Such women, if in call centres earn Rupees 10,000 to 30,000 a month, their lives will be financially secure and secure. Was this security there before? In such security, they can purchase good housing, get married, purchase vehicles, and take care of the expenses of their families. Also, the traveling expenses are saved because of the company providing conveyance. Also, their time is saved. So, do call centre women benefit or suffer because of the call centre industry; no matter what the work pressures? When our unions have been crying foul all these decades or centuries, what will any other groups do for enforcing labour laws? If labour laws are to be made, it should benefit all, men and women alike.

- *if such incidents occur again (God forbid), then the call centre be asked to close down for not being able to protect its women employees*
- *demand union/association rights for women working in call centres*

Why should the call centre close down? If there is such a burden, it is best not to allow women to work at night. But when this is done, some women (and even organisations) will fight for the right of women to work at night, and then demand extra protection for them. Other companies should also close down if their male or female employees meet with any mishap on the way in the company bus. Will you agree? If not, then what logic can we use for closing the call centres?

If you were in the call centre industry and/or dependent on it, would you consider closing down the industry because of the incident? You would surely say, "Because of one incident why should I suffer?" How many ladies in call centres would want a call centre to close down because of an incident? Many poor, illiterate or backward girls become bar girls, cabaret dancers, or prostitutes because of lack of jobs or insufficient earning. Better than that is the call centre industry, is it not?

Are you sure that unionisation is not allowed in call centres? Unionisation is certainly discouraged because of the large stake involved, but I think it is allowed by law. We should go against the corrupt government who oppresses and suppresses labour laws and labour movements, and give some support to the socialist and other groups who sincerely fight for the cause of oppressed women and men workers, rather than worrry about unionisation only for call centre women. The demand for union rights in call centres should not be only for women. It should also apply to all employees. There are many civic and civil rights common to both men and women. There are many men in call centres also who are unaware of their rights. There are many women, and men, in other industries also. We should educate them also.

- *create awareness among women working in call centres of their working and other civic rights*
- *offer legal aid, counseling to women working in call centres for their problems*
- *research and study what the fall-out of this industry is on women and ask government to make policy decisions and strictly enforce them.*

Legal aid and counseling for women? Not a bad idea. But why only in call centres? And should not priority be given to other oppressed women? Like domestic servants, factory workers, small scale & large scale industry workers, schoolteachers, nurses, private office workers, women at home (housewives)? It is the so-called "bechari" call centre women who are the most pampered and who least need or want any sort of help from NGOs. In my experience it is quite some of these call centre women who do the most politics and do not want to sit with males in the cabs and quarrel and defame and make false complaints against their colleagues and play the dirtiest politics. What can you do about

such women? What should be done? What is your opinion and action plan? In your opinion what is to be done in the matter?

Women want to work in call centres. They will have to expect certain discomforts. Make and enforce all the policy decisions you want. Especially for security. Talking of security. Have you ever seen policemen as a routine patrolling the streets at night? When that happens, the women's problems will be solved to a great extent. Enforce the government system first, wipe out the rot in the police and administration first. Do you know that a lot of the rapes in India take place in police custody/premises? It would be helpful if we pay some attention to these women also.

Indira Gandhi, Kiran Bedi, Maneka Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi were/are all famous and strong-willed and powerful women. But none of them did anything for the upliftment of women. The supreme court of India once ruled that women priests be allowed in Hindu society. What a lovely idea! How will allowing women priests uplift the lot of women? People who are thrilled at the thought of permitting women priests (thinking that this is a boon for women and a plus mark for their country) should be told one thing: Why not allow women of all ages to enter the controversial Shabarimala Ayappa temple? Also, both you (I suppose) and I are Catholics. Should we not allow women priests, bishops and popes also?

Nigel Shaughnessy

Ways to Spot Quacks and Vitamin Pushers

How can food quacks and other vitamin pushers be recognized? Here are a few signs that should arouse suspicion.

When Talking about Nutrients, They Tell Only Part of the Story.

Quacks tell you all the wonderful things that vitamins and minerals do in your body and/or all the horrible things that can happen if you don't get enough. Many claim that their products or programs offer "optimal nutritional support." But they conveniently neglect to tell you that a balanced diet provides the nutrients most people need and that government guidelines makes balancing your diet simple.

They Say That Most Diseases Are Due to Faulty Diet and Can Be Treated with "Nutritional" Methods.

This simply isn't so. Consult your doctor or any recognized textbook of medicine. They will tell you that although diet is a factor in some diseases (most notably coronary heart disease), most diseases have little or nothing to do with diet. Common symptoms like malaise (feeling poorly),

fatigue, lack of pep, aches (including headaches) or pains, insomnia, and similar complaints are usually the body's reaction to emotional stress. The persistence of such symptoms is a signal to see a doctor to be evaluated for possible physical illness. It is not a reason to take vitamin pills.

They Allege That Modern Processing Methods and Storage Remove all Nutritive Value from Our Food.

It is true that food processing can change the nutrient content of foods. But the changes are not so drastic as the quack, who wants you to buy supplements, would like you to believe. While some processing methods destroy some nutrients, others add them. A balanced variety of foods will provide all the nourishment you need.

Quacks distort and oversimplify. When they say that milling removes B-vitamins, they don't bother to tell you that enrichment puts them back. When they tell you that cooking destroys vitamins, they omit the fact that only a few vitamins are sensitive to heat. Nor do they tell you that these vitamins are easily obtained by consuming a portion of fresh uncooked fruit, vegetable, or fresh or frozen fruit juice each day. Any claims that minerals are destroyed by processing or cooking are pure lies. Heat does not destroy minerals.

They Claim That Diet Is a Major Factor in Behavior.

Food quacks relate diet not only to disease but to behavior. Some claim that adverse reactions to additives and/or common foods cause hyperactivity in children and even criminal behavior in adolescents and adults. These claims are based on a combination of delusions, anecdotal evidence, and poorly designed research.

They Claim That Soil Depletion and the Use of Pesticides and "Chemical" Fertilizers Result in Food That Is Less Safe and Less Nourishing.

These claims are used to promote the sale of so-called "organically grown" foods. If an essential nutrient is missing from the soil, a plant simply doesn't grow. Chemical fertilizers counteract the effects of soil depletion. Quacks also lie when they claim that plants grown with natural fertilizers (such as manure) are nutritionally superior to those grown with synthetic fertilizers. Before they can use them, plants convert natural fertilizers into the same chemicals that synthetic fertilizers supply. The vitamin content of a food is determined by its genetic makeup. Fertilizers can influence the levels of certain minerals in plants, but this is not a significant factor in the American diet. The pesticide residue of our food supply is extremely small and poses no health threat to the consumer. Foods "certified" as "organic" are not safer or more nutritious than other foods. In fact, except for their high price, they are not significantly different.

They Claim You Are in Danger of Being "Poisoned" by Ordinary Food Additives and Preservatives.

This is another scare tactic designed to undermine your confidence in food scientists and government protection agencies as well as our food supply itself. Quacks want you to think

they are out to protect you. They hope that if you trust them, you will buy their "natural" food products. The fact is that the tiny amounts of additives used in food pose no threat to human health. Some actually protect our health by preventing spoilage, rancidity, and mold growth.

They Recommend "Supplements" and "Health Foods" for Everyone.

Food quacks belittle normal foods and ridicule the food-group systems of good nutrition. They may not tell you they earn their living from such pronouncements—via public appearance fees, product endorsements, sale of publications, or financial interests in vitamin companies, health-food stores, or organic farms.

The very term "health food" is a deceptive slogan. Judgments about individual foods should take into account how they contribute to an individual's overall diet. All food is health food in moderation; any food is junk food in excess. Did you ever stop to think that your corner grocery, fruit market, meat market, and supermarket are also health-food stores? They are—and they generally charge less than stores that use the slogan.

By the way, have you ever wondered why people who eat lots of "health foods" still feel they must load themselves up with vitamin supplements? Or why so many "health food" shoppers complain about ill health?

They Claim That "Natural" Vitamins are Better than "Synthetic" Ones.

This claim is a flat lie. Each vitamin is a chain of atoms strung together as a molecule. With minor exception, molecules made in the "factories" of nature are identical to those made in the factories of chemical companies. Does it make sense to pay extra for vitamins extracted from foods when you can get all you need from the foods themselves?

They Promise Quick, Dramatic, Miraculous Results.

Often the promises are subtle or couched in "weasel words" that create an illusion of a promise, so promoters can deny making them when the "feds" close in. False promises of cure are the quacks' most immoral practice. They don't seem to care how many people they break financially or in spirit—by elation over their expected good fortune followed by deep depression when the "treatment" fails. Nor do quacks keep count—while they fill their bank accounts—of how many people they lure away from effective medical care into disability or death.

Quacks will tell you that "megavitamins" (huge doses of vitamins) can prevent or cure many different ailments, particularly emotional ones. But they won't tell you that the "evidence" supporting such claims is unreliable because it is based on inadequate investigations, anecdotes, or testimonials. Nor do quacks inform you that megadoses may be harmful. Megavitamin therapy (also called orthomolecular therapy) is nutritional roulette; and only the house makes the profit.

They Use Disclaimers Couched in Pseudomedical Jargon.

Instead of promising to cure your disease, some quacks will promise to "detoxify," "purify," or "revitalize" your body; "balance" its chemistry or "electromagnetic energy"; bring it in harmony with nature; "stimulate" or "strengthen" your immune system; "support" or "rejuvenate" various organs in your body; or stimulate your body's power to heal itself. Of course, they never identify or make valid before-and-after measurements of any of these processes. These disclaimers serve two purposes. First, since it is impossible to measure the processes quacks allege, it may be difficult to prove them wrong. Moreover, if a quack is not a physician, the use of non-medical terminology may help to avoid prosecution for practicing medicine without a license—although it shouldn't.

They Claim That Sugar Is a Deadly Poison.

Many vitamin pushers would have us believe that refined (white) sugar is "the killer on the breakfast table" and is the underlying cause of everything from heart disease to hypoglycemia. The fact is, however, that when sugar is used in moderation as part of a normal, balanced diet, it is a perfectly safe source of calories and eating pleasure. Sugar is a factor in the tooth decay process, but what counts is not merely the amount of sugar in the diet but how long any digestible carbohydrate remains in contact with the teeth. This, in turn, depends on such factors as the stickiness of the food, the type of bacteria on the teeth, and the extent of oral hygiene practiced by the individual.

They Warn You Not to Trust Your Doctor.

Quacks, who want you to trust them, suggest that most doctors are "butchers" and "poisoners." They exaggerate the shortcomings of our healthcare delivery system, but completely disregard their own—and those of other quacks. For the same reason, quacks also claim that doctors are nutrition illiterates. This, too, is untrue. The principles of nutrition are those of human biochemistry and physiology, courses required in every medical school. Some medical schools don't teach a separate required course labeled "Nutrition" because the subject is included in other courses at the points where it is most relevant. For example, nutrition in growth and development is taught in pediatrics, nutrition in wound healing is taught in surgery, and nutrition in pregnancy is covered in obstetrics. In addition, many medical schools do offer separate instruction in nutrition.

A physician's training, of course, does not end on the day of graduation from medical school or completion of specialty training. The medical profession advocates lifelong education, and some states require it for license renewal. Physicians can further their knowledge of nutrition by reading medical journals and textbooks, discussing cases with colleagues, and attending continuing education courses. Most doctors know what nutrients can and cannot do and can tell the difference between a real nutritional discovery and a piece of quack

nonsense. Those who are unable to answer questions about dietetics (meal planning) can refer patients to someone who can—usually a registered dietitian. Like all human beings, doctors sometimes make mistakes. However, quacks deliver mistreatment most of the time.

They Encourage Patients to Lend Political Support to Their Treatment Methods.

A century ago, before scientific methodology was generally accepted, valid new ideas were hard to evaluate and were sometimes rejected by a majority of the medical community, only to be upheld later. But today, treatments demonstrated as effective are welcomed by scientific practitioners and do not need a group to crusade for them. Quacks seek political endorsement because they can't prove that their methods work. Instead, they may seek to legalize their treatment and force insurance companies to pay for it. One of the surest signs that a treatment doesn't work is a political campaign to legalize its use.

Stephen Barrett, M.D.
Victor Herbert, M.D., J.D.

The Truth about the Gita

A more apt title would have been "The Myth of the Gita". For all that is traditionally said about it is open to serious doubt. Was a great war was really fought on the plain now hollowed as Kurukshetra? In case it was fought, did every principality in the India of the day, and some even beyond India, join one side or the other? What was the date of the war? Was there a Krishna, Vasudeva who elected to be charioteer of Arjuna? Did Arjuna, said to be single-handed victor of many battles, lose his nerve when he saw the mighty army of Duryodhana arrayed against the smaller one of his own? Granting that he was, in fact shaken by he thought of having to kill his kith and kin to gain a kingdom, could a pot talk by Krishna prepare his mind for the terrible carnage which followed? And did the two vast armies, poised for the battle, stand still while the question and answer session between Arjuna and Krishna went on for the better part of a day?

Another important question that faces is thus: In case the Bhagvad Gita, the song, Celestial, was actually sung by Krishna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, how did it come down to us? The full text of the Gita, says the *Mahabharata* was reported at the end of the day by Sanjaya to the old and blind Dhritarashtra sitting miles away in his palace near Hastinapura. Not only did Sanjaya report every word that dropped from the blessed lips of Krishna, but he also described the setting of the divine discourse without missing the slightest gesture by the head or hand or the very

lifting of an eye-brow. Unseen by anyone, unhurt by any weapon, he moved freely from one side of the battle front to the other. Day and night made no difference to him. He knew no fatigue and worked round the clock. He read the innermost thoughts of everyone as though he had an open book before him.

Naturally this leads us to another question. how did Sanjaya manage to do what sounds incredible? How could he put the inventions of the present scientific and technological age, the radio, television, and video to shame? The traditionalists will, of course, retort that even to pose such question is silly. They will tell you that the sages of that bygone age were only a notch below the gods and they had the poser to grant any boon, and Vyasa was a supreme lord of boons. And so, when Dhritarashtra, the congenitally blind Kuru king keenly waiting to follow fortunes of the war , prayed that Sanjaya his crony, be given the boon seeing and hearing and knowing everything. Vyasa gave it readily. Obviously, these miraculous powers were given only for the duration of the war. For we do not know of Sanjaya having used them afterwards. Furthermore there was a point when these powers let him down. On the last day of the war, Satyaki spotted him and might have put him to the sword but for the timely intervention of Vyasa.

Brushing aside the traditionalists who put pious gloss over ugly facts, it should be bluntly stated here that Dhritarashtra, thus favoured by Vyasa was Vyasa's illegitimate son. Can a holy man like Vyasa be guilty of lechery? Yes, he was. And he was himself the natural son of Satyavati, the offspring of her pre-marital sex with Parasara a great sage. And in his turn, the greater sage, Vyasa, was the father of four illegitimate sons in all.

Frankly, the age of the *Mahabharata* was the Permissive Age *par excellence*. In that age drinking and dicing were customary. Cattle-lifting and the abduction of prospective brides were widely prevalent. Fratricide and genocide were not uncommon. To ensure royal succession and to avoid sure passage to hell, the birth of a son even outside wedlock was actively promoted. Indeed, it was at the insistance of Satyavati, the queen-mother, that Vyasa impregnated her two royal daughter-in-law, Ambika and Ambalika. For their dissolute husband died prematurely without leaving a son to continue the Bharat dynasty.

So wide spread was the permissiveness of the age that sexual looseness, bordering on depravity, was not at all confined to the Bharat dynasty. It was very much present in all dynasties as well. To traditionalists all this may be another proof of the miraculous power of sacrifices, but to a modern man with a liberated mind this can only be skullduggery that was being widely practiced by the so called sages. It is quite likely that the illegitimate children of an illegitimate sage were palmed off on a willing Drupada as gifts from heaven. It looks as though it was also the age of illegitimacy. For, we find, apart from royal princess, the two leading teachers of archery of the age (both of them from the priest caste) were also illegitimate; reference here is

to Drona and Kripa. Of course, their questionable origins are hidden, as usual, behind smoke screen of sanctimony. Can any one who cares for naked truth deny that fornication in its grossest form was part of the more important of the Vedic sacrifices?

There is ample justification for referring here at some length to what is frankly putrid stuff. For our traditionalists extol the *Mahabharata* day in, and day out as the Fifth Veda. They tell us that it is the longest epic in world literature, indeed an encyclopedia of all knowledge, a verifiable treasure, house of history and polity, of sociology and philosophy, of religion and ethics, and of much else. They even tell us that what is not found in its pages is not worth knowing. To counter their balderdash, it needs to be said that the *Mahabharata* is also Vyasa's Thesaurus of Vice.

Are our minds so conditioned by our puerile Puranas that we can be fooled by any fanatic nonsense? Is there something basically wrong with our national psyche? I am pretty sure that most of the contributors to *Mahabharata* fast during an eclipse and take a bath at its end, feeling joyous that by their piety they saved the sun or the moon from mortal danger. It is clear proof that they were born believers, grew up as believers and one day will die as believers. They are incapable of doubting, of questioning and of putting anything to the acid test of reason. In their view to doubt, any old belief is to be an infidel, to question it is to be guilty of sacrilege, to seek to put it to test of reason is to condemn oneself to a long term in hell. I know that these are strong words, perhaps harsh words, but they are, I submit, not uncalled for in view of the credulity, bordering on imbecility, which is much in evidence in every sphere of our national life today.

Without any apology for drifting too far from Kurukshetra and the chariot of Arjuna stationed on no man's land to serve for the time being as a pulpit for Krishna, let us now return to the sermon he delivered in the form of the Gita. When Sanjaya, the war correspondent of yore, was giving graphic oral report to Dhritarashtra that evening was anyone recording it on electronic tape for the use of posterity? No, but was not Vyasa there to work wonders? He had a prodigious brain unmatched even by the latest computer. With its help, he edited four Vedas, composed the *Mahabharata*, authored eighteen major Puranas, wrote *Brahma Sutra* and did a lot more. To him reproducing the text of the Gita which is after all a tiny fragment of the mighty and weighty Mahabharata was child's play. And he did that many years after the Kurukshetra War. Along with the rest of that epic, he taught the Gita to four of his disciples, besides his son. One of the four was Vaisampayana, and like his Guru, he also had a computer brain. When Janamejaya the grete grand-son of Arjuna, performed a great sacrifice to extirpate the Naga clan, Vaisampayana recited for the edification of the great assembly at the sacrifice the whole of *Mahabharata*, including the Gita. On that occasion Souti Ugrasravas was present and he, in his turn, recited it from first to last for the benefit of Sounaka and a host of

other sages who performed a twelve-year sacrifice in the Naimisa Forest. It is not on record as to who took up the role of recital from Souti.

However that may be, the point is that between the original teaching of the Gita by Krishna and its recital by Souti at least a century must have elapsed. For after the Kurukshera War, Yudhishtira rules for thirty-six years; Parikshit, his successor, ruled for sixty years. It is not known when exactly Janamejaya launced genocide of the Nagas as a measure of revenge for their assassination of his father Parikshit. Nor is known definitely how many years later Sounaka initiated his sacrifice at Naimisa Forest. But of one thing there can be no doubt. The time-lag between Krishna's teachingof the Gita and its recital by Souti cannot be taken as less than a century. Not one but several centuries must have elapsed from the time Souti to the time of the final reduction of the Gita in writing. If we have to give credence to traditionalists, that gap is to be reckoned not in centuries but in millennia. Over such a wide gap in time did the text of the Gita as taught by Krishna retain is original size or shape or the scope of its message?

It can, of course, be argued by the traditionalists that the Vedas were reduced to writing after a much longer gap than the Gita and yet even nuances of its pronunciation retain their original purity. But the Gita is no Veda and even now its scriptural authority is not universally accepted. In fact, none seems to have taken the Gita very seriously before Adi Sankaracharya who lived in A.D. eighth century, and wrote a commentary on it as a part of campaign to destroy Buddhism. Not to speak of others, neither the Arya Samajists nor Brahmo Samajists attach much value to the Gita. And so, any analogy sought to be drawn between the purity of the text of he Vedas and of the Gita can hardly be relevant.

The improbable setting in which the Gita is said to have been taught and the dubious way in which it is supposed to have been handed down to us are good enough reasons to convince a rational mind that it is a myth. Having first read the Gita when I was a fresher at college and having given very many years to the study of innumerable commentaries on it, I am convinced that all that is said about the Gita, including its authorship, its time and place of composition, its transmission from generation to generation, its importance as compendium of a unified and profound system of philosophy with relevance for all people and all times, in a word, everything that is sedulously propagated about it is a myth.

V R Narla
(From Introduction to Book
The Truth about the Gita,
published in 1988)

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THOUGHT & ACTION

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Pre-Copernican Dabblings

First, the forecasts, or character-readings, are so bland, vague and general that they fit almost anybody and any circumstance. People normally read only their own horoscope in the newspaper. If they forced themselves to read the other 11 they'd be far less impressed with the accuracy of their own. Second, people remember the hits and overlook the misses. If there is one sentence in a paragraph-long horoscope which seems to strike home, you notice that particular sentence while your eye skims unseeingly over all the other sentences.

The common tendency among educated people to indulge astrology as a bit of harmless entertainment. I doubt if it is harmless, and I wonder whether people who describe it as entertaining have ever actually been entertained by it.

Astrology, is an aesthetic affront. Its pre-Copernican dabblings demean and cheapen astronomy, like using Beethoven for commercial jingles. It is also an insult to the science of psychology and the richness of human personality. I am talking about the facile and potentially damaging way in which astrologers divide humans into 12 categories. Scorpios are cheerful, outgoing types, while Leos, with their methodical personalities, go well with Libras (or whatever it is).

Richard Dawkins

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The Road Covered!

Friends,
We have great pleasure in placing this report before the people of Maharashtra. The work of ANS is expanding in all respects. It is noteworthy that the work goes on only with popular support and without any grants from either the government or any foreign aid agency. It is a people's movement that eradicates superstition, engenders scientific outlook and puts into practice the Satyashodhaki (search of truth) legacy bequeathed to Maharashtra by Mahatma Jotiba Phule. It grows with peoples' co-operation and affection.

This report pertains to the period June 2007 to May 2008 and is a very brief account of ANS' work. But it will, it is hoped, give a fairly accurate idea of its work. Suggestions are welcome as they will help us reset our course in appropriate direction and make our programmes more significant. ANS take this opportunity to express their heartfelt gratitude to all those who have contributed to these programmes in one way or other.

State level conference for supporting and organizing inter-caste, inter-religion marriages: This conference was held at Latur by ANS on 12th/13th of Jan. 2008. The objective of this conference was to present a model of an ideal inter-caste/inter-religion marriage before the society in order to gain its full support for such marriages. Ex vice Chancellor, Janardan Vaghmare, Dr. A.H. Salunkhe, Dr. Baba Adhav, Prof. Pushpa Bhave, Dr. Vijayam Gora (Andhra Pradesh), Sunita Dhumale (USA), MLA Vikram Kale and Vilas Vagh attended the conference and offered valuable guidance. In this conference, ANS decided to establish centres for helping couples of inter-caste/inter-religion marriages in all parts of Maharashtra.

March to establish communication for opposing the 'Dakin' custom: This inhuman custom of exploiting women prevails in the tribal districts of the state. ANS has been, for the last three years, opposing this practice tirelessly in the Nandurbar District. To eradicate this practice the Nandurbar district administration, Maharashtra, ANS and a few other organizations organized a march from Dhadgaon (Nandurbar District) to the seat of the Adivasi Deity, 'Devamogaradevi' in Gujarat. The participants of the march contacted 7000 Adivasis in 300 villages. Well known people from various fields-health, education, politics, social work and reform movements participated and resolved to eradicate this inhuman practice.

State level conference of Friends of Serpents: The first such conference was organized by the state forest department and the ANS on Jan. 18th and 19th in Aurangabad. Their slogan was, 'We will not let any body be killed by snake bite; will not kill any snake and will not violate any law'. Forest Minister, Babanrao Pachapute; Chief Secretary of Forest Department, J.P. Dange and others attended the conference along with Friends of the Snakes from 32 districts. The Forest Minister Babanrao Pachpute announced an annual 'Friend of Snakes' reward and resolved to hold such conference every year.

Debate on 'Declaration on Education in Scientific Outlook and Eradication of Superstition: This debate was held on 23rd and 24th Feb.2008, in Pune. Dr. Raosaheb Kasabe, Prof. Dr. N.D. Patil, Dr. Achyut Godbole, Shri Datta Desai, Dr. Sudhir Panse, Dr. Yashavanta Sumant, Dr. Anant Phadake, Dr. Naresh Dadhich, Dr. Shriram Lagu, Amol Palekar and Prof. Ashok Bhoite guided the debate. Representatives of a number of Educational Institutions-Principals, Professors- and ANS activists attended in large numbers. Composing this kind of declaration was a first such attempt in India. Educational Institutions are being approached for accepting the declaration. This will boost up ANS' work in the field of education.

Conference for 'Search ofTruth behind Miracles': Some leading politicians wanted to felicitate Anuraadhabai Deshmukh, on completing 25 years of her so called miracle of producing 'Vibhuti' through her fingers. ANS held the above conference at Latur on 16th Dec. 2007 to oppose this attempt to give social prestige to such a trivial so called miracle and the miracle monger. Dr. N.D. Patil, Comrade Narassaiya Adam, Bhai Pannalal Surana, Arun Deshpande, Bhai S.M.Patil graced the largely attended conference. The Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh was expected to attend the felicitation of Anuradha Bai. But the atmosphere against it created by ANS prevented him from attending such crass miracle mongering.

Struggle against Buvabaji: The strength of ANS lies in the constant struggle against Buvabaji. In the year of this report ANS have achieved a great deal in this respect. The Kalki Bhagavan, a comparatively recent self proclaimed 'tenth incarnation' from the south has started spreading his tentacles in Maharashtra. His one time colleague from an educational institution, Vishvanath Swami (Chennai) is determined to expose him. ANS arranged Swami's public lectures and press conferences all over Maharashtra. The Goa ANS exposed one Chauvan Guruji who claims that he awakens people's Kundalini (whatever that means), so that they attain liberation. Shirtode

(literally one who breaks heads!) Maharaj from Atapadi in Sangali District used to claim that he can bring rain by performing Yadnya. ANS challenged him and stopped his fraudulent business. A Shanimata from Shahada (District Nandurbar) produced vermilion from her fingers, ate burning camphor and performed such other miracles. ANS exposed her thoroughly. A modern Buvabaji of Dr. Ashvinikumar who used 'mind power' to bend spoons was also exposed by ANS. The Church at Dapodi (in Pune) was doling out charmed water to people to cure them from all diseases. ANS distributed leaflets against this fraud and was successful in making the Church discontinue the practice.

Allah's Woman: A god woman (rather an Alla's woman) Saida Garadi from Kolhapur was exposed by ANS workers. Many more instances like-Malibaba of Jalagaon promising sons, Dattababa of Gadahinglaj who claimed to expel a ghost through the nose of the afflicted individual, Ratnamala Dharankar from Chandrapur, Rameshvar Shastri of Hinganghat, Sikandar Shahbaba of Jalana, Madhukar Joshi of Bhusaval and Sharmababa from Bhusaval- totalling about 70 can be added to the list of this years work of exposing Buvabaji. In addition the many cases of Bhanamati from Umarkhed, Latur and Islampur were bared and resolved by ANS activists during the current year.

Nirmalamata: ANS registered their protest against the felicitation of Nirmalamata by the Pune Municipal Corporation by sitting blind folded in the Mahatma Phule Wada for a day.

Cutting off matted locks of hair: There is a widespread belief that hair gets matted because of divine wrath and cutting those matted locks invites the death of the person with locks as well as the one who cuts them. ANS activists cut the locks of the following people giving them great relief from the filthy, grimy locks as well as the superstitious belief. Their names: Dipali Kaka Madane, an eight year old girl from Peth (Valava Taluka); Mrs. Nirmala Popat Madane,37 years, from Bendri (Tasgaon, Dist. Sangali); Masa Kundalik Banasode, 49 years, from Mohol (Dist. Solapur) and Mrs. Vimal Jadhav, 43 years, from Satara.

Satyashodhaki Marriage: ANS centres at Kolhapur and Latur encourage and help inter-caste and inter-religion marriages. Both these centres together performed 33 inter-caste and 14 inter-religion marriages. A cordial contact with the parents of such couples is invariably solicited.

Celebrating the Commitment to the Constitution: This celebration was held on the 26th of Jan. by ANS starting with flag hoisting by a toiling Dalit woman, procession of the Constitution of India, a public discourse and ending with a declaration of commitment to the Constitution. The festival received an encouraging response from 20 districts of Maharashtra.

Echo-friendly Holi Celebration: ANS offers constructive, imaginative and suitable alternatives to all absurd religious practices. This includes: collecting and burning of waste, burning an effigy of vices social as well as ones own. This year, with the enthusiastic help of the Harit-Sena of the department of social a-forestation these programmes were very effectively celebrated all over Maharashtra.

Resolve of Youth-In the Service of the Country: This movement commenced on 9th Aug.- the Kranti Din (Revolution Day) - with the joint efforts of North Maharashtra University and ANS. Former Minister, Honourable Madhukarrao Chaudhari, Vyankatanna Ranadhir, Vice Chancellor Dr. Mukund Baride, Jaykumar Raval, MLA, Prof. Subhash Vare, and Navanath Shinde graced the occasion.

The First Ever Test of Astrology: There had been no test in India to ascertain whether Astrology is a science. ANS has developed such a scientific test. Significantly the test was developed under the guidance of Dr. Jayant Naralikar. Consequently IUCAA, the prestigious institution of Astronomy and Astrophysics in India too participated in the test. The department of Statistics of the University of Pune have offered to help in developing the test and analyzing results. ANS is also struggling to get the study of Astrology in higher education introduced by the UGC discontinued.

Progress in getting the Law 'on exploiting superstition'enacted: This law has been inching forward since long. Many difficulties still persist. The law has now been passed on to the Joint Committee that consists of many MLAs holding a positive attitude towards it. Yet its progress is very slow. ANS is struggling hard to hasten the process. However considering the lethargy on the part of the government, the ANS is planning to initiate a movement around the beginning of the monsoon session.

Eco-friendly Immersion of Ganesh Idols and Offerings to the deity: The organization has carried out this programme for over ten years on a very large scale in the face of opposition by Hinduist organizations. This became possible because of people's strong support. A noteworthy development conducive to ANS' work is that this year the Maharashtra Government Pollution Control Committee have issued orders to provide alternative facilities for this purpose in accordance with Supreme Courts directions for controlling pollution. The demand made by ANS is thus met with by concrete action.

ANS' Participation in Police Training: There are a number of Police Training Centres in Maharashtra with 500 trainees in each of them. There are some important auxiliary topics in their training like scientific outlook and eradication of superstition. ANS' assistance in the shape of training and demonstrations in this respect are much valued by both the trainee police and their officers.

Organisation: The organization works through 180 branches covering 30 districts of Maharashtra. The programmes offered by the ANS are much in demand. Many NGOs want to introduce them in their states. During the year of this report all the branches of the ANS together have arranged 1500 lectures and similar programmes to awaken people. ANS seems to be the only organization that offers programmes of awakening the people on such large scales attracting remarkable response. A disciplined participation of youth from all castes and creeds is another important distinctive feature of ANS.

Dr. Narendra Dabholkar

Godmen and Mortal World
Happenings at Asaram Bapu's Ashram

Death of two students of Gurukul (traditional schools run by Hindu Gurus) of Asaram Bapu's Ashram (July 2008) has raised multiple questions. The children staying in the Ashram were missing for some time before being found dead near the river. The post mortem showed that some of their organs are missing. The parents of the children accused the Ashram residents for practicing black magic and removing children's organs. Asaram in reply said that the residents of his ashram hear Bhagvat and other holy books, how they can be involved in such an act and that they won't even kill a dog. Later two related events took place. One, when Asaram had to travel by air and as a part of security drill he was frisked second time, a random check applied some times,

his followers created ruckus. The listeners of Bhagvat etc. rampaged and expressed their anger for the Holy man being subjected to the mundane rules. Also the same ashramites attacked the journalists, severely beating up a woman journalist, who had to be hospitalized. So much for the Bhagavat induced tolerant attitude!
This holy man has lot of other incidents to his account. In Jhabua area his female Sadhvis beat up the nuns in the Christian mission school when a 13 year old girl was raped and killed by an outsider, who had nothing to do with the school. The same Holy seer sat on protest dharana when Shankaracharya was arrested on the charges, which were far from divine. An act of solidarity indeed! An FIR has also been filed against him for grabbing one and a half acre of land in Patna. He has a vast network of devotees and followers, even his disciples are giving pravachans (holy discourse), keeping his photo in the backdrop. He is in the race for the most popular Godman, along with Sri Sri Ravishaker, Baba Ramdeo amongst others.

His is not an isolated case. While these three top Godmen are very visible, they are not the only ones. This phenomenon is sprawling and one can see them mushrooming every where with ever increasing following. Recently in Kerala one Godman created scene when arrested by police. Shakaracharya's Ashram also showed lot of muck in its cupboard. Surely this is the most proliferating phenomenon in recent times marching parallel with increase in the religiosity and might of RSS at social and political level.

There are types and types of Godmen but still one can say that majority of them are politically close to the RSS/VHP/BJP combine. Asaram Bapu sat on dharana along with Vajpayee et al and recently. Sri Sri Ravishanker and Baba Ramdeo were all praises for Advani while releasing his autobiography, which justifies the politics of Hate and his own role in that. They subtly spread the message that minorities are violent as they consume meat etc. forgetting that the most violent person of all the time Hitler was a vegetarian. And the followers of these Godmen are mercurial in their temper and aggressive in their stance. Another such 'Holy man, Narendra Maharaj's followers also created trouble when he was not permitted to carry his holy staff in the aero plane. They were also involved in the attack on nuns in Alibagh, these nuns were doing the AIDS awareness work and that was presented as 'conversion' a pretext enough to beat them up.

When these Godmen are giving such peaceful sermons and eating satvik food, (food creating peaceful tendencies as per them), how are they so violent? According to traditional system of medicine type of food

determines the nature of man. So Muslims the meat-eaters are violent and the vegetarian Hindu are tolerant, that's how the social common sense says here. This has been the part of demonization of Muslims. Violence is due to the ideas and underlying premises of the teachings they imbibe. They listen to the exclusionary discourse, Hindus are under threat is part of the preaching of many of these and some of them are deliberately planted in Adivasi areas to scare the Christian missionaries away. Lakkhanand in Orissa and Aseemanand in Dang, Gujarat are two examples of that. They have been attacking the missionary work in the area of education and health. Incidentally in these areas around Christmas time, attacks are organized against churches and priests.

Along with the adverse effects of globalization the rise of these Holy men can clearly be seen. One was surprised to note that some of these Babas, (holy men) claiming to renounce the worldly goods are extremely prosperous themselves and have such a rich clientele that they can undertake an expensive month long luxury cruise along with these holy people and listen to the divine discourse in the midst of sea waves. Also there is a very impressive self designed dress code for the men of God. While one need understand this phenomenon at deeper level what can be said off hand is that their ashrams and activities should be within the parameters of law, subject to the usual checks and balances of a civic society. In case of Brinda Karat raising questions about the composition of medicines being produced by his factory, Baba' followers were aghast as to how can ordinary mortal raise such question about the Baba. To assert that the laws of the land should not be applied to them cannot be acceptable in society and polity. To reduce the fraud which is seeping in many of these Ashrams, it will be worth its while to inculcate voluntary social audit, based on ethical values and laws of Indian society. All those involved in the death of these children and beating up of journalists must be subjected to the punishment due to them.

One has seen many a types of saints. During medieval period the Bhakti and Sufi saints stood for reform of society, emphasized on moral values of religion and included all in the fold of their community. They talked against blind faith and emphasized on the unity of all human beings. That's why we see that people cutting across religions flocked them. Today it seems that a large genre of those wearing holy robes are revivalists, pushing back the social values and exclusionary in their approach to the society. Their main focus is on giving calm and tranquility to the affluent, to be close to those with money and power. They are mute against the evil practices of untouchability, bride burning and manifest caste system.

Their association with politics of RSS combine clearly gives an indication as to how they prepare the ground for their societal agenda. We do need to emphasize on reform of the society, to look at dogmas and blind faith critically and to ensure that society develops in a humane direction. Some of them dish out the RSS ideology in a more sophisticated way, with the halo of divine sermon. While one appreciates their social welfare work, one will like that transparency is brought into their operations and medicines they produce should be regulated by the laws of the land. Can one expect that the tragic incidents of Asaram's Ashram will open our eyes to be more vigilant about their deeds?

Ram Puniyani

How Asaram Bapu Fooled Me?

As a retired person who has well established family and family members and a person who has studied Asaram closely and once was his follower I can understand what psychology has and how demeaning cunning and low self esteem this leader is. My article is based on the personal research and personal meeting with his followers. I thank to god that I was able to get out of his ashram before I gave up my life savings to Asaram, because I was given talks like see this guy is here from so many years even he had a luxurious life, the fact is all his money and luxuries are owned by Asaram. I was taught in ashram to tell new recruits that we have so many followers and give examples of followers who had been made to left their homes, and family and they are living here in ashram. I was made to recruit more and more people to work in ashram and seduce them to give up their family responsibilities in the name of spirituality. I was shocked when I was told to tell my grand child that I don't love him if he doesn't tell his father means my son to come and join ashram
in Ahmedabad.

Asaram Bapu's cult exploits its members' vulnerability in order to gain complete control over them, often using unethical psychological techniques to bring about thought reform. It can be said that a Asaram Bapu cult attempts to alleviate its members' vulnerability through spiritual guidance in an effort to help them exercise control over their own lives.

You probably know it as the doomsday cult whose Kool-Aid mass suicide/murders took more than 900 lives in Jonestown, Guyana, in

1978. How can something that began with so much hope go so very wrong? There's a lot of speculation about what happened to the members of The People's Temple, but for the most part, what went wrong is what goes wrong with destructive cults likeof Asaram Bapu.

It's really a two-part problem. First, Asaram Bapu cult is founded by a single person who retains a position of exclusive power within the organization, and power tends to corrupt even the most ethical among us. In the case of The Asaram Bapu, there is evidence that its leader, Asaram Bapu, is abusing religious beliefs and is involved in forgery, scams, land grabbing, land encroachment, seduction, mass fanatics protestors. Because Asaram Bapu groups operate outside the mainstream, there is usually no one checking up on their operating procedures, so a corrupt or mentally unstable leader like Asaram Bapu is free to exploit his followers to his heart's content. In addition to this authoritarian leadership structure, some primary tactics or characteristics of a destructive cult like of Asaram Bapu uses are :

Charismatic leadership: It is Asaram himself who poses himself as god to his followers. and followers become fanatic in believing Asaram as god and they forget in real god or the supreme power.

Deception in recruiting: Asaram manipulates his new followers by showing he is a religious man rather than coming in open and telling this is my past and how many people and families I have ruined for my own benefit.

Use of thought-reform methods: Asaram followers who are manipulated to live in ashram as Sadhu are never left open to know what is happening in the world, they are made to listen to his tapes 24 hours /day and think about Asaram only.

Isolation (physical and/or psychological) : Asaram Bapu has grabbed lands and built number of ashrams all over India with small rooms and instructs his followers to lock themselves in room for hours and think about Asaram only, they call it dhayan. In fact in psychology a person is made to think about Asaram only and only Asaram. Plus most of his followers are dislocated like Delhi follower will be sent to work in his Ahmedabad factory and Ahmedabad follower will be sent to Delhi vice versa. he has number of places to hide his followers if followers family want to take their son/daughter back to their homes.

Demand for absolute, unquestioning devotion and loyalty: Asaram will ask for total dedication from his followers who are living in his ashram, or are new recruits, they are not allowed to pray to any god except Asaram, they are not allowed to believe in or listen to any other religious leader.

Sharp, unsurpassable distinction between "us" (good, saved) and "them" (bad, going to Hell) : Asaram Bapu has made categories like hierarchy in followership -- like a new follower is seen as a skeptic, and then when a person leaves his home and starts living in his ashram then he is given some work, and made to think if he works hard and recruit more people form his family then he is promoted with in his cult. Followers are taught any one who speaks against Asaram Bapu is an evil, and his followers will go to the person who speaks the truth about Asaram and will harass him, like they did to Nana Patekar, to news magazine in Delhi, or to respectable saint in North Delhi.

"Inside language" that only members fully understand: Ask any of the family members who are hurt by Asaram what happened to their child, in fact followers attitude towards parents and family changes , and he sees them as an outsider, and his sect in ashram has their own code words like satta bazaar has their own words same way Asaram followers who are living in Ahmedabad ashram has their own words which we can't understand. in these words they tell each other we can trust the third person or be aware of the person because he is against Asaram, or if we can make fool and con the person of his money or can make him a slave for their ashram.

Strict control over members' daily routines: Asaram Bapu controls the daily routine of his followers who are living in his ashram by not giving them any real knowledge or skill rather than to emotionally blackmail them and make them speak they were unhappy in this world now they are happy by ruining their life and family and are happy while working as slaves in un humane conditions, It's amazing to see some people are working 20-22 hours per days and have been working in the ashram form last 10 years . Asaram in his private meeting with his staff will manipulate all court cases against him and say these outsiders people are fool they are suing me, they cant do anything to me.

Asaram bapu and his cult followers are driven by political and financial goals as well. In the end, it's all about subjugating members' individuality to achieve the desires of Asaram Bapu(s), whether that means reinforcing a self-proclaimed messianic status, participating in

destructive activities in the name of spiritual revolution or simply filling the Asaram Bapu's pockets with their hard-earned money. Asaram Bapu sect employ similar recruiting and indoctrinating techniques as destructive religious cults, targeting people with certain vulnerabilities and then playing on those vulnerabilities to keep them "in the fold." The end result is a "convert" who will blow himself up in the name of destroying capitalism, try to get all of his loved ones to buy into the same business deal that he is losing his life savings on, or keep signing up for an unending series of lectures, seminars and retreats that promise psychological and spiritual healing but really only drain his bank account.

Anonymous

Paul Kurtz's Visit to Centre for Free Enquiry at Pune

World renowned rationalist Paul Kurtz delivered a lecture on *'The Scientific Temper and Secularism: Toward a New Planetary Ethics*' on 11 Sept 2008 at Pune University. He was coming from Chennai after receiving Honorary Doctorate from Periyar University, Chennai and was on the way to Delhi.

He addressed the students and faculty members of the University. He mentioned that Centres for Free Enquiry have been established all over the world and a few centres are functioning in India which are supposed to be think tanks on science, religion and ethics. We must approach towards humanistic ethics which is very crucial at present. In many parts of the world the pseudo-scientific ideas like creationism, intelligent design and sighting of UFOs are gaining predominance. Surprisingly 90% of Indian scientists are believers in religion as against 93% American scientists are atheists/agnostics. 65% US scientists are skeptics who question the religious and traditional authorities. Though the constitution of India specifically mentions about spirit of inquiry - thanks to the foresight of Dr B R Ambedkar - even then the religion is playing major role in the social and political life in India.

While relating science and the public, Paul Kurtz stressed upon scientific naturalism, naturalistic methodology and ethical naturalism. Public appreciation and understanding of differences between science and scientific temper is limited. There is a need to enlighten the public on these aspects. Knowing or studying science or using scientific gadgets does not result into acquiring scientific attitude in the life. One should start asking questions like how the human species evolved? how the

planets, solar system and galaxies came into existence?. Then only critical thinking will develop. One should know the methodology of science which is a key point which includes hypothesis, theory, prediction, verification etc. Unlike religion, science stresses upon falsification. This is very crucial. We have to acquire the quality of critical thinking which includes objectivity, rationality. Ethical naturalism leads to secular humanism. In this there is no place for God. This is specially required in the present day controversial changing social relations amongst different communities and societies.

One should be critic of Gurus, paranormal phenomena, UFOs and astrology. No one questions the statements made in religious books like Holy Bible and Quran. There are charlatans like Uri Geller who fool the public at large. All religious leaders promise salvation. You cannot criticize the religion. Religion has social consciousness. Meticulous investigation of religion, religious traditions and principles will reveal their true nature.

While explaining about secularism, Paul Kurtz identified the main characteristics of secularism like separation of church/temple & state and secularization of values beyond religion. In fact American Congress will never be able to make any law handing the authority of state to religion. While identifying the ethics of secular humanism for the individual, he mentioned that autonomy of individual freedom, enlightened self interest, tolerance of diversity of life styles, exuberance, an ethics of excellence and reason etc are essential. As a secular human being we have responsibility to others - empathy and altruism, moral education to children, use of science to improve human conditions. We should test the values and principles by their consequences and not by religious books. We must keep in our mind the ethic of principles i.e. means/end criteria. He also mentioned that we have to march towards an new planetary ethics. The world is shrinking; borders are vanishing; and technology is making an interdependent world. There are common roots of homo-sapiens who have come out of Africa. There is no gender, religious, language, race or caste discrimination. Humanity as a whole need to respect the dignity and worth of all person and mitigate the suffering, increase the happiness and we all have obligation to protect the earth. While concluding his lecture he quoted the pledge of allegiance to the Earth.

The lecture was ended with question - answer session and with vote of thanks.

Prabhakar Nanawaty

Scourge of the Godmen

One extraordinary man's fight against deception

On the afternoon of the last Saturday in March 1993, London's Conway Hall was packed with 350 people who had come to see miracles. They were not disappointed. The performer was everyone's idea of a bearded Indian guru. He ate glass, ran flaming torches along his bare arms, handled burning camphor freely and put it into his mouth, hung a weight on a hook stitched through his skin, shoved a nasty-looking spike through his tongue without any harm or bleeding, caused pieces of paper to burst into flame by the power of thought, changed a single biscuit into a pile of dozens of them, produced enough holy ash out of thin air to decorate half the audience, showed spoons that bent and broke at a touch, and, of course, turned water into wine. Miracles every inch of the way.



And that would have been enough for any self-respecting guru. But this was no guru. This was the Indian skeptic Basava Premanand, whose mission was not only to demonstrate miracles, but to explain how they were all done. And this he did, to the further amazement and amusement of his audience. There was a time in his youth when Premanand was highly impressed by the miraculous feats of those Indian yogis he calls "godmen". He was willing to learn from them, and he spent a great deal of time and effort trying to acquire their magical powers, but doubts began to creep in. The yogis were for ever telling other people how to achieve good health, not to mention immortality. So how come a number of the godmen had cancer, rheumatic complaints, liver complaints, tuberculosis, asthma, diabetes...?

One yogi's reply to Premanand's query was "I could achieve health, but I am consciously atoning for sins in a past life". But it was soon obvious that a critical frame of mind was not welcome, and he was invariably asked to leave the yogi's temple. For example the yogi Sivananda's response to Premanand's probing was "No questioning! Get out!"

The young Premanand's skepticism took a practical turn. One Godman was regularly brought out and put on show while apparently possessed. Premanand wondered if gods ever went to the toilet. So he laced the Godman's bottles of country liquor with Epsom salts. In mid-

performance the mystic called out for a wooden barrel. He sat on the barrel and evacuated into it while his head and body continued to sway in tune with the supposed possession. A disappointingly human response. It was soon clear that every one of the godmen's miracles was merely a trick, and since 1976 Premanand has been mercilessly exposing their methods.

He became particularly incensed by poor people being tricked into handing over sizeable amounts of their hard-earned money for worthless remedies and advice. "Religion," he says, "is a means to exploit people who believe in god." Even worse, the famous and highly influential Sai Baba "has followers amongst bureaucracy, law enforcement departments, revenue departments, the judiciary, the state and central ministry, and among the elite and the influential".

Premanand toured the villages and small towns of India in a jeep, and deliberately set off the jeep's alarm when he stopped at the roadside. He treated the crowd of onlookers to a miracle show in the manner of a Godman, and then set about exposing the trickery. "If the claims of the godmen are false," he says, "then godmen should be prosecuted for cheating the credulous public in order to exploit them. Or, if they are true, the education department should stop teaching the theories of science to their students". Right now, Premanand is gunning for Sai Baba in particular, and is in the process of taking him to a court of law.

Premanand's case was that Sai Baba deals in gold but does not have a license for this as required by India's Gold Control Act. However, the judge ruled that the law does not apply to Sai Baba because he materialises his gold from thin air. Premanand has given over 7000 lectures, "educating our people in the scientific temper". And by now he has met about 20 million people, and visited 27 countries. 25 days of every month are spent traveling, and he has written 30 books in Malayalam (the main language of SW India) and 6 in English.

In 1989, he was awarded a fellowship by the Director of the Communication Department of India's Council for Science and Technology. His brief is to complete a video library of 1200 miracles, to write books, and to train 1000 people to tour 50,000 villages. "They will explain the science and tricks behind miracles, superstitions, and blind beliefs, so that exploitations in the name of gods and miracles are stopped". He is now close to fulfilling a dream of 40 years: the building of a research centre, with a library where explanations of religion, magic, science, miracles and psychic phenomena are available to

everyone. This is to be on a 15-acre site in Kerala, at a spot that the poet Rabindranath Tagore named "Shrishaila".

Premanand has not achieved all this without attempts on his life. He has been physically attacked by the Godmen's followers. He has been hospitalised, his car has been tampered with by Sai Baba's goons so that it overturned at speed, and a lorry has tried to run him down. None of these things has dampened the energy of this remarkable man born in 1930: he is Convener of the Indian Rationalist Association, and since 1976 he has been Convener of the Indian Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, otherwise known as the Indian Skeptics.

In 1988 he began publishing Indian Skeptic, and it still comes out every month. It's a magazine that goes in for plain speaking. Premanand led the August 1991 issue with an article headed: "Uri Geller -- the liar, the crook and the fraud". And to make sure the message reached its target, he sent a copy of the magazine to Geller by registered post. Each issue includes the methods for performing a number of miracles, a long-term project because there are 1200 miracles to get through.

Talking of miracles, everyone who was in that Conway Hall audience can now perform the feats that at first seemed impossible. And so can you. For example, you can mimic holy ash with a pellet of anything that will crumble into a powder. (In India, cow-dung works wonders.) Hide the little pellet between your fingers, and when you're ready for the miracle, start crumbling. The supply of "ash" can seem endless. Some items require simple gimmicked apparatus. The spike doesn't really go through the tongue: there's a little U-bend in the middle that fits around the tongue. But it looks alarmingly realistic.

Is there anything else Premanand would like to accomplish in his lifetime? "Oh yes," he told me. "To see a real miracle before I die". But I can't convey in print the twinkle in the eye, or the blossoming grin. It was like so many of Premanand's performances. You had to be there.

By Lewis Jones

Godmen - the solution to all problems?

The other day, I was going through a local publication in NJ and I was little perturbed to see the number of advertisements posted by the "So called Godmen" Cure for cancer in 24 hours!! Sour relations? lost money in business? We have solutions to all your problems!!

I am not opposed to Saints and Mahatmas giving discourses, reading out scriptures or even guiding you to lead your life more meaningfully. I do understand that sometimes we get lost in this rat race and we all need a spiritual boost once in a while. But, I am definitely concerned about the whole process of targeting weak human minds. We are certainly cognizant of these things in India, may be because we still have a population that is largely illiterate. But, most of us who come to the U.S are with degrees and are qualified enough to rationalize things. Despite this, the market for Super Human Beings exists in NJ and quite strongly, I must say.

Some listeners said that there is no link between education and a weak mind and when you have no hopes, you want someone to show light. Some said they are complete fraud while some others mentioned that when you do have the facility in terms of money to go and consult, you utilize it.

I have no doubts about the lack of honesty and integrity in some who call themselves super human beings and have made this whole affair a money making business. I am only worried that, are there too many of us who are emotionally very stressed out in this part that we seek solace from such things. One other way of looking at it is that, there are some who for whatever reason may have lost confidence in themselves and when these super human beings give them hope, they get motivated, albeit the hope given to them is false. It is all in the mind and the way you regulate your thought process, right?

What is your take? What do you think about these so called Super Human Beings? Why do you think they are present in large numbers in NJ and may be in other parts of the U.S that has a dominant Indian population?

Atheist

Abraham Kovoor

Abraham Thomas Kovoor (April 10, 1898 - September 18, 1978) was an Indian professor and Rationalist who gained prominence after retirement for his campaign to expose as frauds various Indian and Sri Lankan "god-men" and so-called paranormal phenomena. His direct, trenchant criticism of spiritual frauds and organized religions were enthusiastically received by audiences, initiating a new dynamism in the Rationalist movement, especially in India. Born at Thiruvalla in Kerala,

Kovoor was the son of Rev. Kovoor Eipe Thomma Katthanar, Vicar General of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar. He was educated at Bengabasi College, Calcutta. After working briefly as a junior professor in Kerala, he spent the rest of his life in Sri Lanka, teaching botany in several colleges before retiring in 1959 as a teacher at Thurston College, Colombo.

As a rationalist

After retirement Kovoor devoted his life to the rationalist movement. He spent most of his time building up the Ceylon Rationalist Association, and was elected in 1960 as its president, a title he retained until his death. He edited an annual journal, The Ceylon Rationalist Ambassador. In 1961 he traveled in Europe and established contact with the World Union of Freethinkers. Under the pseudonym Narcissus, he wrote newspaper and magazine articles about his encounters with the paranormal. These articles were translated and published in India, initially in Malayalam by Joseph Edamaruku and later in other Indian languages.

Kovoor traveled in India several times during 1960s and 1970s, addressing hundreds of meetings. His brilliant oratory, enlivened with a scientific approach and critical thinking, worked like magic in Indian villages and towns. During four Miracle Exposure lecture tours in India, all organized by the Indian Rationalist Association, Kovoor challenged and exposed 'miracles' performed by godmen. During his last journey to India in 1976 Kovoor visited Sai Baba's ashram and challenged him to face a test. The baba refused.

A controversy arose when Kovoor was awarded an honorary doctorate by the obscure (and now defunct) Minnesota Institute of Philosophy, calling itself the theological seminary of a "Church of Materialism." Kovoor had never visited the US. A strong critic of fake diplomas and doctorates used by charlatans, he later returned the honorary doctorate. Abraham Thomas Kovoor died on September 18, 1978. "I am not afraid of death and life after death", he wrote in his will. "To set an example, I don't want a burial." He donated his eyes to an eye bank and his corpse to a medical college for anatomical study, with instructions that his skeleton eventually be given to the science laboratory of Thurston College. All of these wishes were honored.

Exposing the famous guru Sathya Sai Baba

One of the main targets during his miracle exposure campaign was Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi in Andhra Pradesh state, India. Sathya Sai Baba is perhaps the most prominent god-man in India today,

and was during Kovoor's time. Sai Baba claims to this day to materialize vibuthi or holy ash. Kovoor believed that the Baba performed this through sleight of hand. Many Indians throng to the ashrams of holy men who claim to perform such miracles. To expose Sai Baba and others, Dr Kovoor would produce holy ash seemingly from nowhere and distributed it amongst the audience. He would then demonstrate to his audience the sleight of hand, explaining that after some practice, anybody could perform the feat .

Kovoor wrote repeatedly to Sai Baba, requesting a meeting to discuss the baba's miraculous powers. Upon receiving no response, Kovoor communicated his intention to come to one of Sathya Sai Baba's ashrams, at Whitefield near Bangalore. When Kovoor arrived, Sathya Sai Baba had gone to his other ashram at Puttaparthi. He was an efficient hypno-therapist and applied psychologist. The famous Malayalam movie "Punarjanmam" and Tamil movie "Maru piravi" was made on basis of his case dairy. Bharathiya Yuktivadi Sangam declared a national award called A. T. Kovoor Award for the secular artist. The first award was conferred to the legendary Indian film star kamal Haasan for his Humanist Activities and Secular Life.

Abraham Kovoor's challenge

After his numerous encounters with god-men, astrologers, and other people who claimed to have psychic powers, he came to the conclusion that there was no objective truth behind such claims. He wrote, "Nobody has and nobody ever had supernatural powers. They exist only in the pages of scriptures and sensation-mongering newspapers." His books Begone Godmen and Gods, Demons and Spirits, about his encounters with people claiming psychic powers, are still best-sellers in India.

In 1963, Dr Kovoor announced an award of Rs. 100,000 for anyone who could demonstrate supernatural or miraculous powers under foolproof and fraud-proof conditions. The challenge listed 23 miracles or feats that godmen (and some western mystics and performers such as Uri Gellerand Jeane Dixon) were claimed to perform, such as reading the serial numbers from currency in sealed envelopes, materializing objects, predicting future events, converting liquids from one kind to another, and walking on water. Some sought publicity by taking on his challenge, but forfeited the initial deposit amount. After his death in India, the Indian Rationalist Association continues his Rs.100,000 challenge. Similar challenges have been posed by Basava Premanand and James Randi.

Rationalist

Books by and on Prof. Kovoor In English

- Begone Godmen - Jaico Publishing House, Mumbai, India.
- Gods, Demons and Spirits - Jaico Publishing House, Mumbai, India.
- Selected Works of A T Kovoor- Indian Atheist Publishers, New Delhi, India.
- Exposing Paranormal Claims - Indian CSICOP, Podannur, Tamil Nadu, India
- Soul, Spirit, Rebirth & Possession - Indian CSICOP, Podannur, Tamil Nadu, India
- On Christianity - Indian CSICOP, Podannur, Tamil Nadu, India
- On Buddhism - Indian CSICOP, Podannur, Tamil Nadu, India
- Astrology & Hinduism - Indian CSICOP, Podannur, Tamil Nadu, India

Unmasked!

In 2000 journalist Ritu Sehgal witnessed a modern miracle in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. This is how she set the scene: "It is a sleepy Sunday afternoon in Makkanpur, old men sit in front of the village shop in the shadow of the Neem tree playing cards and drinking tea. Suddenly they raise their heads. Two unusual guests approach.... Clad in saffron robes, a sadhu comes nearer, followed by his disciple. Barefoot through the mud the holy man and his companion move with measured steps. The sadhu lifts his hand for a blessing and enters the premises of the sarpanch's house. Some young men run and bring a charpoi and place it in the middle of the courtyard. The holy man sits and folds his legs ceremoniously. Eyes fixed in the clear blue afternoon sky, he does not move. The news of the sadhu's arrival spreads fast.... Within minutes the whole village is present. All eyes are fixed on the holy man. The sadhu rises. Through his disciple he lets the villagers know that a curse is lying on Makkanpur. He makes them see the bad omen with their own eyes. He throws a coconut on the stony ground: it breaks, blood squirting out and splashing all around. The audience is awestruck. He has come here, the sadhu lets them know, to use his magical powers to free them from threatening disaster and misfortune."

What follows is an extraordinary display of those supernatural power: the holy man causes a pot to burst into flame and produces eleven lemons from his mouth. He pierces his cheek without drawing blood, reclines on a bed of nails, and appears to levitate under a sheet. The crowd are enraptured. Having proven his power he can now be relied on to cure the town of its curse. It's all too easy to be seduced by this

portrait of the mystical East, to assume that its rich spiritual heritage brings a meaning and beauty to life so lacking in the materialist, sceptical west. Attracted by the notion of gurus, sadhus, babas and tan-tricks roaming the land, selflessly curing the masses of affliction, politicians and film stars flock to receive blessings from super-gurus like Sri Sathya Sai Baba.

But on this occasion, the village witnesses a rather different kind of miracle. Just as the performance is reaching its climax, with the sadhu hovering above the ground, a man leaps up from the crowd and shouts "Stop! This is no holy man". He tears down the sheet under which the guru is 'flying', to reveal the two hockey sticks he is using to raise it.

"We are rationalists" declares the intruder, Sanal Edamaruku, secretary general of the Indian Rationalist Association. "We have come here to show you how sadhus and god-men are using simple tricks to cheat you." The sadhu himself is divested of wig and beard and revealed as a completely ungodly rationalist volunteer. He's no guru – just very skilled at conjuring, and well-schooled in the basic chemistry which dictates that certain fluids will ignite on contact, that lit camphor won't burn the skin, that weight evenly distributed on nails won't puncture. The miracle is that the spell has been broken. Once the crowd have absorbed the shock, and broken into laughter, this poor, remote village has been liberated from superstition. Perhaps for ever. As Edamaruku says "what may look like Sunday entertainment for children, is in fact nothing less than breaking the little hook on which the god-men's enormous power, and the fate of their victims, hangs."

Despite a tenacious western orientalism which overemphasises and overvalues Indian religiosity, reinforced by the homegrown 'Hindutva' movement propagated by the BJP (anatomised by Meera Nanda in New Humanist Jan/Feb 2005), India has a long and distinguished rationalist tradition which is considerably older than that of the west. According to Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen, the seeds of rationalism were planted many thousands of years before the Enlightenment, and centuries before Jesus Christ. Buddha himself, or at least Siddharta (who may or may not have been the first Buddha), could lay claim to being the first rationalist, and even the Hindu sacred text the Ramayana contains the character of Javali who advises the god-king Ram that "there is no after-world, nor any religious practice for attaining that…[religious] injunction have been laid down in the [scriptures] by clever people just to rule over [other] people." This tradition also includes practical political rationalism such as that of Buddhist Emporer

Ashoka (273 – 232 BC) who declared religious tolerance and equal human rights with the aim of unifying all India.

Contemporary groups like Edamaruku's Delhi-based Indian Rationalist Association (IRA) and the Satya Shodhak Sabha (Society of Truth Seekers) based in Gujarat, are direct descendents of this tradition. More immediately, they build on the work of the founding fathers of modern Indian rationalism: Mahatma Phule (1827-1890), Periyar Ramasami (1879-1973) and Gora (1902-1975). Phule, son of a vegetable vendor and educated through the philanthropy of family friends, was one of India's most influential social reformers, campaigning against the caste system, the subordination of woman and the invested power of the Brahmin. Periyar, the 'Voltaire of South India', was born in Tamil Nadu to an affluent religious family and made his name publically challenging religionists. Drawing inspiration from the French revolution, he loudly and publically attacked religion as superstition and exploitation. He was a powerful orator and fearless critic: "It gives me extraordinary pleasure", he wrote, "to fling at the pundits their own contradictions, and thus perplex them."

Gora was a high caste Hindu who became a global symbol for 'positive atheism' as well as a tireless campaigner for human rights, and alongside Gandhi, a protester against colonial rule and godfather of democratic India. Phule, Periyar and Gora can be credited with taking the principles of Indian scepticism, rationalism and humanism to a mass audience, though they rarely appear on western lists of rationalist heroes.

Building on this pioneering work it was the Sri Lankan based rationalist Abraham Kavoor (1898-1978), who innovated and extended the techniques of miracle exposure. Kavoor, the son of a vicar, was a professor of Botany, but it was after retirement that he really made his mark as a campaigner against god-men and supernatural fraud. He traveled widely and wrote copiously, bringing all his scientific training and rhetorical power to bear on the practices of the shaman and supposed magicians. He undertook four 'miracle exposure' tours of India in the early 1970s, organised by the IRA and Sanal's father Joseph Edamaruku, even visiting the ashram of Sai Baba, one of Indian's most prominent and popular holy men who, despite his claims to be a god on earth, was unwilling to meet the professor to prove his supernatural powers.

After Kavoor's death in 1978 his mantle was taken up by Basava Premanand (born 1930). Premanand, probably the most box-office of

the miracle exposers, actually started out as a disciple of Sai Baba. Becoming disillusioned in 1975 (having transferred a lot of his property to the guru), and inspired by Kavoor, he devoted himself to exposing Baba's use of (pretty amateurish) prestidigitation to produce 'holy ash' and the cheap trinkets with which he wows his large, and far from exclusively Indian, gaggle of devotees.

It was Kavoor's visit to Gujarat in 1976 which inspired a group of rationalists there to form Satya ShodhaK Sabha (SSS), named after Mahatma Phule's original 1870s organisation. Kavoor's demonstrations convinced a new generation of activists – composed, like most of India's activist-rationalists, of volunteers from the ranks of education and academia spiced with disillusioned former-converts – that public demonstrations and exposures were the most effective way of educating the public and undermining the credibility and the power of exploitative faith healers, sadhu and the rag tag holy men who tour the country exploiting ignorance and fear where they find it. Exposures are part of a sophisticated strategy to influence popular opinion against supernaturalism.

"We do not go out and talk about whether God exists or not, or get involved in abstract disputes of that nature," says Professor BD Desai, secretary of the SSS, who have performed over 1500 miracle exposures since 1982. "We are not concerned with showing how clever we are compared to the ignorant masses. We want to talk to people in a language they understand, to expose falsehood and contradictions, and show how the miracles are basically a ploy to distract and misguide people from their genuine problems."

The SSS work on a number of fronts simultaneously. In addition to exposing the fakery of fakirs, they work as a semi-official abuse monitoring service, helping to identify, expose and prosecute sadhus involved in sexual exploitation. "In India male children are highly valued. If a woman cannot conceive a male she will often seek out the help of a sadhu, who claims that using ritual and sacrifice he can heal her. Often such situations end up in rape or sexual abuse. A complaint will be made to us, we will send undercover volunteers to investigate and gather evidence, and if possible go to court to help secure a conviction." In this they are fully supported by the local police and receive a degree of state support.

Then there are the cases of supernaturalism which do not involve shifty sadhus, but more complex and fascinating psychological motives than mere greed. Professor Desai relates the story of a 14 year-old boy in the

remote sea side village of Kantiyazad, who was believed to have been possessed by the avatar (spirit) of the god Jalaram Bapa – how else to explain the fact that he had begun intoning verse in Sanskrit, a language he did not know? When rationalist investigators arrived they discovered that the boy, neglected in favour of two smart older brothers, had memorised the verses, which were pasted up in his father's shrine. The apparent possession was an attempt to gain the attention and approval of his father. Or how about the strange appearance of cuts in a young wife's sari every time she was due to leave the house with her husband? On closer inspection, the evil omen turned out to be the result of some nifty scissor work by a frustrated sister-in-law confined to the house. In both cases the investigators made a point not to expose the fraudsters in public, but to work with the families to achieve some kind of settlement which would remove the motive for the false possession.

Each case reveals the deep connection between India's structural inequality – the caste system, gender subordination – and the lure of supernaturalism, the desire to be heard, to escape or to grasp some approximation of meaning apparently offered by the holy-rollers. The crucial skill of the Indian rationalist tacticians is to be able to combine a sense of theatre comparable to that of the most extravagant sadhu, with a recognition of the link between India's social inequalities and superstition. Desire for social transformation, in the west more associated with radical progressive politics, goes hand in hand with the desire to expose fraud. Tactically astute, organisations like the SSS know that miracle exposures, successful as they are, will not of themselves transform Indian social inequality, but they form the conspicuous surface of an underlying strategy: "We are wedded to social change, but to create acceptability we need to make inroads in the thinking of the people. Exposures achieve this, as does our voluntary work of all kinds. We have exposed over 50 frauds, and many mid-level gurus have left the state, but our focus is on the people. First and last we want people to think rationally. Once that happens the gurus will not remain anywhere."

Professor Desai is clear that while the forms of Indian activism can be an inspiration for a renewed practical western rationalist project, western traditions of rationalist and humanist thought remain an essential model for India: "Our entire enlightenment depends on the west, and we have a lot more to learn." In his speech at the conference in 1999 which celebrated 100 years of the Rationalist Press Association (RPA), Sanal Edamaruku was explicit about the vital role played by the availability of cheap copies of classic western humanist texts, printed by

the RPA, publishers of the journal you are reading now: "The Cheap Reprints and the Thinkers' Library series during the middle of the 20th century reached far-off places and provoked thinking people to come out and plan organised efforts to influence change." One of the most influential successes of Indian atheist publishers was to translate much of the Thinker's Library, and many other classics of humanism, into local languages like Malayalam. "If you happen to come to Kerala one day," Edamaruku concludes "don't be too astonished to meet a teashop boy who has read Charles Darwin's Origin of Species." The influence, in the end, is two-way.

Indian rationalism continues to claim some significant victories: exposing not only dozens of home-grown charlatans but also imported varieties such as evangelical fraudster Morris Cerullo and faith healing huckster Clive Harris; ensuring that astrology was deprived of the status as a legitimate profession and preventing it from being adopted on the university curriculum; and securing the right to register 'no caste or religion' on official forms, are just some of the practical achievements they can claim. But neither Desai nor Edamaruku are complacent about the challenges still to come. To the problems of illiteracy, superstition and sectarianism are added the renewed perils of Islamic fundamentalism and the machinations of imported Christian missionaries.

For the rationalists, the work goes on. Professor Desai, since retirement working harder than ever for the cause, continues to lecture, speak and write (his organisation has published scores of books and pamphlets in Gujarati) as well as appearing as a material witness in abuse cases. Edamaruku runs the IRA with tireless enthusiasm, using all media – TV, the Internet, magazines, public speaking – to get the message out. From exposing 'the prime minister's astrologer' Lachman Das Madan on live TV to running his paranormal investigation centre which exposes contemporary hoaxes such as the photograph of the giant skeleton, reputed to be a Rakshasa (mythical giant), in fact revealed as a fairly clumsy piece of photo trickery, Sanal Edamaruku is probably the hardest working man in the miracle-busting business. His most recent success was on live television across the subcontinent. On October 20th Indians were glued to their TVs watching live as Astrologist Punjilal, who had predicted that he would die between 3 and 4pm on that day, lay down to his fate. Edamaruku had appeared on the 10 o'clock news the night before, confidently predicting that nothing would happen. By the time the astrologist gingerly arose at five past four, and was declared in perfect health by a doctor, Edamaruku had struck another, very public, blow to the credibility of supernaturalism.

These activists and many others with the same dedication to truth and ability to capture the imagination of the crowd, offer perhaps the best example of how rationalism can be both profound and entertaining. Perhaps, if they have time, some of these practical rationalists might find time to come over to Britain and help us with our superstition issues.

Caspar Melville

What do you mean, "test" astrology?

That was the actual question someone asked me recently. I had said that whenever astrology is tested, it fails the test. Her reply was, what do you mean, "test" astrology? I said, well, compare the predictions made by astrology, to what actually transpires. (i.e., see if it works.) It seemed a pretty obvious reply. It seemed to confuse her, though.

Astrologers don't like testing astrology to see if it works. Can't say I blame them, because it doesn't work. Think of this. An expert astrologer draws up your detailed chart based on your accurate natal data. You are given this horoscope, and two others of different people. Would you be able to tell which one is yours? Because if not, what does it mean to say that astrology works? Whenever this test is done, people are not able to do this with any greater probability than pure chance. (i.e. one in three would get it right.)

Possibly the most detailed test of astrology using this type of method, was performed by Shawn Carlson. His paper, "A Double-blind Test of Astrology", was published in the prestigious peer reviewed scientific journal Nature, in 1985. The interesting thing is that the San Francisco chapter of the National Council for Geometric Research recommended the 28 professional astrologers who took part, and (with Carlson), designed the tests. They also predicted, in advance, what they would consider to be a successful test.

Two tests were performed:

Test #1: Astrological charts were prepared for 83 subjects, based on natal data (date, time and place of birth), provided by the subjects. Each subject was given three charts: one chart based on their own natal data, and two charts derived from natal data of other people. Each subject was asked to identify the chart that most correctly described

them. In only 28 of the 83 cases, the subject chose their own chart. This is the exact success rate expected for random chance. The astrologers predicted that the subjects would select their own chart more that 50% of the time.

Test #2: 116 subjects completed California Personality Index surveys and provided natal data (date, time and place of birth). One set of natal data and the results of three personality surveys (one of which was for the same person as the natal data) were given to an astrologer who was to interpret the natal data and determine which of the three CPI results belonged to the same subject as the natal data. In only 40 of the 116 cases, the astrologers chose the correct CPI. As with test #1, this is the exact success rate expected for random chance. The astrologers predicted that they would select the correct CPI profiles in more that 50 per cent of the trials.

Conclusion by Carlson:

"We are now in a position to argue a surprisingly strong case against natal astrology as practiced by reputable astrologers. Great pains were taken to insure that the experiment was unbiased and to make sure that astrology was given every reasonable chance to succeed. It failed. Despite the fact that we worked with some of the best astrologers in the country, recommended by the advising astrologers for their expertise in astrology and in their ability to use the CPI, despite the fact that every reasonable suggestion made by advising astrologers was worked into the experiment, despite the fact that the astrologers approved the design and predicted 50% as the "minimum" effect they would expect to see, astrology failed to perform at a level better than chance.

"I have not yet received a serious scientific challenge to the paper. The newsletter of the American Federation of Astrologers Network published a response in January (1986). I was very disappointed to see that it largely consists of personal attacks. Its few substantive criticisms are attributable to ignorance of the experiment, of the CPI, and of basic scientific methodology."

So the astrologers failed their own test. Does this mean they gave up astrology as being useless? Of course not: they are totally closed minded to the possibility that astrology doesn't work. Of course, in science one test alone doesn't decide things. That's why I have summarized below an additional similar types of tests that astrology failed.

1. Compiled personality profiles from biographies of 2000 sports figures, actors, scientists, and writers. Compared these profiles with personality traits associated with the sign of the sun, moon, and ascendant according to eight astrology texts. No correlation was found using either the sidereal or tropical zodiac

2. Examined records of suicides in NYC from 1969 to 1973. Selected all suicides who were born in NYC and for which birth data was available. This resulted in 311 suicide cases. For each of these, a control subject was randomly chosen who was born in the same borough and year. The suicides and matching controls were divided into three groups according to year of suicide. A computer program was used to test 100,000 different astrological factors in each of the 622 birth charts for significance between suicide and control groups. None of the factors consistently correlated with the suicide cases. Examined records of suicides in NYC from 1969 to 1973. Selected all suicides who were born in NYC and for which birth data was available. This resulted in 311 suicide cases.

3. All found no correlation between sun sign and personality traits as measured by standardized psychological tests, mostly the California Personality Inventory (CPI). However, Pellegrini found a slight correlation between the CPI femininity index and season of birth.

4. Compiled natal charts and results of Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory and the Leary Interpersonal Check List for 196 subjects. Compared 13 personality traits with sun signs, signs and houses of the moon and 8 planets, and with five planetary aspects. No correlations were found. These two studies found no correlation between sun sign and personality traits measured by the CPI, including the femininity index.

5. Studies found correlations between astrological factors and the Introversion/Extroversion index of the Eysenck Personality Inventory. Showed that the correlation above could be explained by the fact that some of the subjects knew what the expected results would be for their astrological.

6. Studies found no correlation between astrological factors (sun and planetary) and personality, including the introversion/extroversion index.

7. A double blind test of astrologer John McCall was organized at the University of Virginia by Charles Tolvert and Philip Ianna. McCall claimed an 80 percent success rate in choosing the correct natal

horoscope for a subject from three false ones. Twenty-eight subjects were chosen according to McCalls requirements (naturally born Caucasians). McCall had 7 successes out of 28 trials, exactly the number predicted by chance.

8. The studies found no correlation between marriage/divorce rate and sun sign combinations in the state of Michigan and the city of Amsterdam respectively. John Mc Gervey Physicist Western Reserve University Found that the sun signs of 6,000 politicians and 10,000 scientists were randomly

9. Astrological readings were done for a groups of subjects. The content of some of the readings were reversed (changed phrases describing the subject to their opposites). Subjects reported that both the reversed and normal readings applied 95 per cent of the time

10. Found no correlation between occupation and the zodiac signs containing Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and the Moon at the time of birth.

11. Found random distribution of the house containing Saturn for successful individuals, and the house containing Mars for murderers.

12. Found no correlation between occupation, medical problems, height, longevity, and the zodiac signs containing Mercury, Venus, Mars, and Jupiter at the time of birth.

13. Pretty much the same study and results as the previous reference. Additionally, no correlation was found between occupation, medical problems, etc. and angular separation (along the ecliptic) of planet pairs at time of birth.

14. Astrologers prepared horoscopes for subjects correct natal data. Reversed charts were then constructed from the correct charts by retaining the sun sign, but reversing all of the planetary aspects. Half of the subjects were given correct charts, the other half were given reversed charts. There was no correlation between the perceived accuracy of the charts and whether the subject was given a correct or reversed chart.

15. Horoscopes were prepared for correct natal data and for a birth date 5 years and 6 months before the correct date, with the correct sun sign retained. Thirty subjects were given the correct and incorrect charts. Half of the subjects picked the correct chart, half chose the incorrect chart.

16. Six expert astrologers independently attempted to match 23 astrological birth charts to the corresponding case files of 4 male and 19 female volunteers. Case files contained information on the volunteers' life histories, full-face and profile photographs, and test profiles from the Strong-Campbell Vocational Interest Blank and the Cattell 16-P.F. Personality Inventory. Astrologers did no better than chance or than a non-astrologer control subject at matching the birth charts to the personal data; this result was independent of astrologers' confidence ratings for their predicted matches. Astrologers also failed to agree with one another's predictions.

17. A study of 2,000 people, most born within minutes of one another, tracked over several decades. The study looked at more than 100 different characteristics, ranging from IQ to ability in art and sport, from anxiety levels to sociability and occupation - all of which astrologers claim are influenced by heavenly bodies. He found no evidence of the similarities that astrologers would have predicted.

18. The experimenters found no evidence of similarities between the "time twins". "The test conditions could hardly have been more conducive to success... but the results are uniformly negative," the research report said.

19. Dean said that the consistency of the findings weighed heavily against astrology: "It has no acceptable mechanism, its principles are invalid and it has failed hundreds of tests. But no hint of these problems will be found in astrology books which, in effect, are exercises in deception," he said.

20. Dean is ready for a torrent of criticism: "I'm probably the most hated person in astrology because I'm regarded as a turncoat." The research undermined the claims of astrologers, who typically work with birth data far less precise than that used in the study. Dean said: "They sometimes argue that times of birth just a minute apart can make all the difference by altering what they call the 'house cusps'," he said. "But in their work, they are happy to take whatever time they can get from a client."

21. In 1971 the Survey Research Centre of the University of California Berkeley sampled 1000 adults in the bay area getting information on natal signs and lots of attributes claimed by astrology to correspond. For instance, Leos are supposed to have good leadership qualities. An analysis by Ralph Bastedo found no correlation for leadership, political stand, intelligence, belief in astrology, musical ability, artistic ability, confidence, creativity, occupation, religion, ability to make friends, to

organize or to feel deeply. This showed that these tendencies do not differ between signs, so natal signs cannot be used to predict personality traits.

22. In 1979 Michel Gauquelin put an advertisement in Ici-Paris offering a free horoscope. Recipients were asked to reply saying how accurate they and their friends found the horoscope. Of the first 150 replies, 94% percent said it was accurate as did 90% of their friends and family. Unfortunately, they all got the same horoscope, that of Dr. Petiot, a notorious mass murderer.

23. In 1985, Harry Edwards checked all the predictions from Old Moore's Almanack for 1984. These were written by a couple of top astrologers. Of the 200 predictions it was possible to check, less than 5% materialized and practically all of those could have been based solely on probability, prior knowledge or astute speculation. Astrologers are no better than pastry cooks, taxi drivers or any of us at predicting.

24. On June 7, 1989 on American television, James Randi offered $100,000 to any psychic or Astrologer who could prove the truth of their claims. An astrologer who took up the challenge was given the birth information of twelve people and had cast their charts. He interviewed the twelve without knowing who was who and was to identify them by matching them with horoscopes. He got none right. (Note: Randi now offers a $1 Million prize.)

25. Finally, Michel Gauquelin created a long running affair, starting in the late 60s, called the Mars effect with some research that looked very promising for astrology. He collected enormous amounts of data from catalogues of famous people ending up with data for thousands of sporting champions, scientists, actors and writers. He found statistically significant correlations between the birth of sports champions and the position of Mars, between actors and Jupiter, between scientists and Saturn and between journalists and Moon. This shouldn't have been too much encouragement because it was only four planets, only four professions, and only for the top couple of percent of those professions. He found no correlations at all for any planet with random samples.

Because of the enormous amount of data it was difficult to reproduce and one attempt at refuting it boiled into a scandal where doubt was cast on the credibility of the refuters. Eventually, a French group, with Gauquelin's cooperation, set up another test of over a thousand sports champions and found a negative result. Gauquelin then argued that some of the champions weren't champions at all and that several other champions had been missed and should have been included. Needless to

say these changes produced a positive result but are clearly post-hoc data manipulation introducing bias.

Since none of these tests are positive for a random sample of people it depended exclusively on how you define champion. Gauquelin wasn't cheating or insincere but he was giving himself permission to select his data by focusing on champions and it was just too much work to find nothing.

Critic

Does science make belief in God obsolete?

But you must find a science-friendly, science-compatible God. First, try the pantheon of available Creators. Inspect thoroughly. If none fits the bill, invent one.

The God of your choice must be a stickler for divine principles. Science does not take kindly to a deity who, if piqued or euphoric, sets aside seismological or cosmological principles and causes the moon to shiver, the earth to split asunder, or the universe to suddenly reverse its expansion. This God must, among other things, be stoically indifferent to supplications for changing local meteorological conditions, the task having already been assigned to the discipline of fluid dynamics. Therefore, indigenous peoples, even if they dance with great energy around totem poles, shall not cause even a drop of rain to fall on parched soil. Your rule-abiding and science respecting God equally well dispenses with tearful Christians singing the Book of Job, pious Hindus feverishly reciting the havan yajna, or earnest Muslims performing the salat-i-istisqa as they face the Holy Ka'aba. The equations of fluid flow, not the number of earnest supplicants or quality of their prayers, determine weather outcomes. This is slightly unfortunate because one could imagine joining the faithful of all religions in a huge simultaneous global prayer that wipes away the pernicious effects of anthropogenic global climate change.

Your chosen God cannot entertain private petitions for good health and longevity, prevent an air crash, or send woe upon demand to the enemy. Mindful of microbiology and physiology, She cannot cure leprosy by dipping the afflicted in rivers or have humans remain in unscathed condition after being devoured by a huge fish. Faster-than-light travel is also out of the question, even for prophets and special messengers. Instead, She must run the world lawfully and unto the letter, closely following the Book of Nature.

A scientific Creator should certainly know an awful lot of science. To differentiate between the countless universes offered by superstring theory is a headache. Fine-tuning chemistry to generate complex proteins, and then initiating a cascade of mutations that turn microbe to man, is also no trivial matter. But bear in mind that there are definite limits to divine knowledge: God can know only the knowable. Omniscience and science do not go well with each other.

The difficulty with omniscience—even with regard to a particle as humble as the electron— has been recognized as an issue since the 1920s. Subatomic particles show a vexing, subtle elusiveness that defeats even the most sophisticated effort to measure certain of their properties. Unpredictability is intrinsic to quantum mechanics, the branch of physics which all particles are empirically seen to obey. This discovery so disturbed Albert Einstein that he rejected quantum mechanics, pronouncing that God could not "play dice with the universe." But it turned out that Einstein's objections were flawed—uncertainty is deeply fundamental. Thus, any science-abiding deity we choose may be incompletely informed on at least some aspects of nature.

Is one being excessively audacious, perhaps impertinent, in setting down terms of reference for a Divine entity? Not really. Humans have always chosen their objects of worship. Smarter humans go for smarter Gods. Anthropomorphic representations—such as a God with octopus arms—are a bit out of fashion today but were enormously popular just a few centuries ago. As well, some people might object to binding God and human to the same rules of logic, or perhaps even sharing the same space-time manifold. But if we drop this essential demand then little shall remain. Reason and evidence would lose meaning and be replaced by tradition, authority, and revelation. It would then be wrong for us to have 2 + 2 = 5, but okay for God. Centuries of human progress would come to naught.

Let's face it: the day of the Sky God is long gone. In the Age of Science, religion has been downsized, and the medieval God of classical religions has lost repute and territory. Today people pay lip service to trusting that God but they still swallow antibiotics when sick. Muslim-run airlines start a plane journey with prayers but ask passengers to buckle-up anyway, and most suspect that people who appear to rise miraculously from the dead were probably not quite dead to begin with. These days if you hear a voice telling you to sacrifice your only son, you would

probably report it to the authorities instead of taking the poor lad up a mountain. The old trust is disappearing.

Nevertheless, there remains the tantalizing prospect of a divine power somewhere "out there" who runs a mysterious, but scrupulously miracle-free, universe. In this universe, God may choose to act in ingenious ways that seem miraculous. Yet these "miracles" need not violate physical laws. Extraordinary, but legitimate, interventions in the physical world permit quantum tunneling through cosmic worm holes or certain symmetries to snap spontaneously. It would be perfectly fair for a science-savvy God to use nonlinear dynamics so that tiny fluctuations quickly build up to earthshaking results—the famous "butterfly effect" of deterministic chaos theory.

Nietzsche and the theo thanatologists were plain wrong—God is neither dead nor about to die. Even as the divine habitat shrinks before the aggressive encroachment of science, the quantum foam of space-time creates spare universes aplenty, offering space both for a science-friendly God as well as for self-described "deeply religious nonbelievers" like Einstein. Many eminent practitioners of science have successfully persuaded themselves that there is no logical contradiction between faith and belief by finding a suitable God, or by clothing a traditional God appropriately. Unsure of why they happen to exist, humans are likely to scour the heavens forever in search of meaning.

Pervez Amirali Hoodbhoy

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